

THESIS.

---

A COMPARISON OF HEBREW AND CHINESE WISDOM,

AS EXEMPLIFIED IN THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

AND THE ANALECTS OF CONFUCIUS.

---

A COMPARISON OF HEBREW AND CHINESE WISDOM,  
AS EXEMPLIFIED IN THE BOOK OF PROVERBS AND THE ANALECTS OF CONFUCIUS.

---

Thesis submitted for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in the Department of Theology  
by

Elizabeth Glendinning Kirkwood Hewat,  
M.A.(1st Class Honours, History; 2nd Class Honours, Philosophy), B.D.

---



1st November, 1933.

## INDEX.

Summary of Argument.	pp. i-x
Chapter 1. Introductory Study.	1-11
Chapter 2. A Discussion and Comparison of the Backgrounds of the Book of Proverbs and the Analects of Confucius.	12-72
1) Introduction.	pp.12-15
2) The Background of the Book of Proverbs.	16-35
3) The Background of the Analects of Confucius.	36-56
4) A Comparison of the Respective Religious Back- grounds of the Book of Proverbs and the Analects of Confucius.	57-72
Chapter 3. The Book of Proverbs.	73-136
1) Introduction.	73-90
2) The Teaching of Proverbs -	
A. On Man in his Various Relationships.	91-121
B. On God and Wisdom, Human and Divine.	122-136
Chapter 4. A Critical Appreciation of the Book of Proverbs.	137-168

(Index continued.)

Chapter 5.	The Analects of Confucius.	169-237
1)	Introduction.	169-176
2)	Confucius.	177-194
3)	The Teaching of the Analects -	
A.	On Virtue.	195-206
B.	On Religion.	207-214
C.	On Politics, Education, etc.	215-237
Chapter 6.	A Critical Appreciation of the Analects of Confucius.	238-264
Chapter 7.	A Final Comparison of the Book of Proverbs and the Analects of Confucius.	265-316
Bibliography.		317-322

---



SYNOPSIS.

---

## CHAPTER 1.

Introductory Study.

The essential genius of the wisdom literature of the Hebrews is pointed out - its sense of the value of life, its belief in moral values, its conviction that God is the foundation of all. Attention is then concentrated on Proverbs, a book which is of special interest in view, on the one hand, of its historical links with different centuries, and, on the other, of its geographical links with the sapiential literature of other lands. The 'Wisdom' point of view was not confined to Western Asia and Egypt. It flourished in China, although there was no organic connection between the two literatures. Chinese sages, like the wise men of Israel, had an enthusiasm for morality; both regarded right living and right thinking as correlatives; both believed in the essentially rational and moral character of the universe, and in the Divine Spirit that underpinned the whole.

---

## CHAPTER 2.

A Discussion and Comparison of the Backgrounds of the  
Book of Proverbs and the Analects of Confucius.

---

On the supposition that the central sections of Proverbs were compiled by 700 B.C., an attempt is made to portray the heritage of thought of that time. The compilers of Proverbs would know the J and E tales, the ancient songs of their country, the Book of the Covenant, the collections that formed the nucleus of Judges, and the history of David's family and court. Some of the prophets would have influenced the compilers - Elijah, Amos, Hosea, and perhaps Micah and Isaiah. From these the Wise had learnt that God was a personal Being of power and might, the God of their fathers and the God of Israel, a God of righteousness and love. The development of Israel's thought of God is traced, its growth in comprehensiveness and depth, and note is taken of the disappearance or decay of unworthy ideas concerning Him.

With regard to the Analects, the question is discussed as to how far the ancient classics, and especially the Shu Ching and the Shih, can be regarded as authentic sources for a study of pre-Confucian thought. A statement is made regarding the conception held of God in the classics - the position assigned to Him, the meaning of the names T'ien and Shang-Ti, and the characteristics attributed to Him. Mention is made of ancestor-worship, and the worship of nature-spirits, and an effort is made to see the connection between and the

significance of the three types of worship, the worship of Shang-Ti, ancestral spirits, and the spirits of nature.

The two backgrounds are then compared, and the differences and resemblances noted. Hebrew thought gives greater prominence to God: this is the main difference. Both are much alike in the way they link religion and daily life, morality and God.

---

## CHAPTER 3.

The Book of Proverbs.

---

After a discussion of the various theories held regarding the date of Proverbs, it is decided to adopt the position that the book mainly belongs to pre-exilic times, and that the two main collections are not later than 700 B.C. The position and work of the Wise are then discussed, and the subject of proverbs in general is treated - their extent, universal appeal, format and significance. It is pointed out that 'the proverbs of Solomon' differ from other national collections in their poetical form, the way they centre round the thought of Wisdom, and in their close connection with religion and God. An indication is given of the teaching of Proverbs on 'Man in his various relationships' - on the wise man and the good, the virtuous woman, the fool, the parent, friend, citizen and king. These are depicted both as they are in their inner life and as they show themselves in their outward contacts with others. A resumé is given of the teaching of Proverbs on 'God and Wisdom, human and divine'. The close connection that exists between God and Wisdom is pointed out, and attention is drawn to the emphasis of the book, on the one hand, on the power, righteousness and love of God, and, on the other, on Wisdom which is said to be 'on the verge of becoming a philosophical doctrine'.

---

## CHAPTER 4.

### A Critical Appreciation of the Book of Proverbs.

---

The book can be criticised for its failure to emphasise the importance of beauty, moderation in thought, intellectual truthfulness, fortitude, courage, and self-sacrifice. Its silence on the last two points is the most to be deplored. The book is an exponent of the homely virtues, rather than of the virtues of hero and saint. The charge that Proverbs is utilitarian must be viewed in the light of its theory of the after-life. Holding a forbidding conception of Sheol, the Wise looked for the vindication of God's justice in this world, asserting that during their lifetime the good were rewarded and the evil punished. Their theory is not borne out by the facts of life; neither is their view that men can be sharply divided into two classes, the good and the bad. The strong points of Proverbs are more marked, however, than its weaknesses. The homely virtues are as necessary as the heroic ones. The virtues the book inculcates are by no means always of a safe and moderate kind. The spirit of Proverbs - its genial interest in ordinary people, its universalistic outlook, its consciousness of the working of Wisdom in every-day life, its simple faith in an active, righteous God - all these are noteworthy features of the book.

---

## CHAPTER 5.

The Analects of Confucius.

---

The Analects contains the table-talk of Confucius, polished and refined to harmonise with the genius of the Chinese written language. Historical criticism that has in recent years dealt hardly with many of the classical writings, has vindicated the reliability of the Analects as giving an authentic picture of the life and view-point of Confucius. A short account is given of the world into which Confucius was born, and the five periods of his life are described - his youth, the period of his work as a teacher, as a political officer, as a peripatetic teacher, and lastly, as a man of letters. Outwardly, his life-story is depressing, but it is inspiring in the light it sheds on his inner spirit, his idealism, and high standards of honour, his dedication to the mission entrusted him, his humility and genuine affection for his students. His teaching can be divided into three main sections - on virtue (the central thought), on religion (the idea that Confucius was irreligious or a sceptic is dismissed), and on the practical ramifications of a good man's life, his responsibilities as governor or governed, as educator or educand, as father or son or friend.

## CHAPTER 6.

A Critical Appreciation of the Analects of Confucius.

---

An obvious weakness of the Analects is the way that it ignores the fact of evil. Its teaching rests on the assumption that man, if he will, can be good - an assumption that individual history has not confirmed. Confucius' political theory is vitiated by the same error, by the naive belief that men in society will submit to the rule of virtue. Although Confucius speaks much of virtue, the virtue he inculcates is sometimes of a mediocre character, and he does not make it clear why man should make goodness the goal of his life. His conception of God is vague, and he does little to satisfy the legitimate desire of men for certitude in religious matters. Taken as a whole, however, the spirit of the Analects is admirable, with its quiet confidence in the supremacy of virtue, its insistence on purity of motive, its penetrating psychological insight. The unsystematic arrangement of the book has, as an ethical force, been of value, for its isolated sayings have been easily remembered, and many have become proverbs of the people. The close connection of the Analects with the life and spirit of Confucius has been an asset in humanising its ethical teaching.

## CHAPTER 7.

A Final Comparison of the Book of Proverbs  
and the Analects of Confucius.

---

Hebrew and Chinese thought are alike in regarding Wisdom and ethics as closely connected; knowledge and right living go together. The thinkers of both lands fought shy of pure speculation. This may have been due to their vivid appreciation of the value of history and experience. Both saw ethics against a wider background - of God or Wisdom (as in Proverbs), of Heaven, or, more definitely, against the doctrine of the Correspondence of Names (as in the Analects). Both gave a place to religion, although this is much more strongly emphasised in Proverbs. In the details of their ethics, there are many resemblances, e.g. emphasis on reticence in speech, distrust of courage, exaltation of friendship. There are also many differences. The raw material of the Hebrew book consists of the proverbs of the people, that of the Analects of the words of a philosopher. This will account in part for the greater number of literary and historical allusions in the Analects, and for its somewhat academic atmosphere. It lays more emphasis on a man's motives than does Proverbs, which speaks mainly of his deeds. But the latter book has a much more realistic sense of the potency of evil. The ethics of Proverbs are more markedly



utilitarian than the disinterested ethical outlook of Confucius, the line of reasoning adopted in Proverbs being possibly the result of the gloomy Hebrew conception of Sheol. In the details of their ethics, the Analects says more of the responsibilities of the son than of the parent, while Proverbs speaks of the duties of both. The latter gives much space to woman, who is almost ignored by Confucius. The Chinese book lays stress on the necessity for observing religious rites, while Proverbs hardly mentions the subject.

While both books are alike in having had a great formative influence on their respective peoples, the teaching of Proverbs is but one voice out of many, its silences being counteracted by the contribution made by prophet, psalmist and priest. The Analects, on the other hand, is a cross-section of Confucian thought. Its weaknesses have not been counterbalanced by other Confucian writings, but rather by those of Taoism or Buddhism, the teaching of which have not formed with it one homogeneous whole. Its defects, therefore, have been a more serious matter in their ethical influence than have been the defects of Proverbs. Its greatest weakness is the vagueness of its teaching on God. Each book, however, must be judged, not for what it has failed to give, but for its positive contribution. This, in the case of Proverbs, lies in the warmth and vividness of its thought of a righteous God, in the case of the Analects, in its noble conception of a virtuous man. The contributions are complementary,

both being based on the broad common foundation laid long before the time of Christ in Palestine and China - of the essential nobility of a man's life that is lived in harmony with the principles on which the universe is founded.

---

Note.

Unless otherwise stated, quotations from Proverbs are made from the Revised Version, and quotations from the Analects are made from Soothill's translation.

---

## CHAPTER 1.

### INTRODUCTORY STUDY.

---

## CHAPTER 1.

### INTRODUCTORY STUDY.

---

"I applied mine heart to know, and to search, and to seek out wisdom, and the reason of things, and to know the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness and madness" (Ecc. 7, 25.A.V.). In these words of the Preacher can be found a characteristic expression of the spirit that animates Wisdom literature. The writings of the Wise breathe, for the most part, a healthy curiosity in regard to life, a sense that the world is worth knowing and will repay honest study, and a clear conviction that moral values are at the heart of the universe. There is no antagonism in their minds between the world of thought and the world of action. The wise man shows his wisdom by his goodness and righteousness, while an evil life is the inevitable expression of a foolish mind.

In the Wisdom literature of the Hebrews, the writers' interest in this world, their sturdy belief in the ultimate trustworthiness of what lies behind the riddle of life, and their strong moral sense do not fill up the whole picture. The basis of their philosophy is God. From Him are derived the created world<sup>1</sup> and the human spirit.<sup>2</sup> The realm of knowledge is founded on man's recognition of God. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge."<sup>3</sup>

---

1. e.g. Job, ch.38-39

2. Prov. 20, 27a- "The spirit of man is the lamp of the Lord".

3. " 1, 7a.

There is, however, a certain reticence and restraint about the religious teaching of the Wise men that mark it off, as a rule, both from the lyrical outpourings of the psalmists and the unequivocal "Thus saith the Lord" of the prophets, and that place the sapiental writings in a class by themselves.

Within the category of Wisdom, or Chokmah חֵכֶם literature there are many divisions. The riddles, fables and parables of early days are succeeded by the polished proverb, the paradox, the gnomic essay, that are found in the book of Proverbs. So too does the peculiar genius of the Wisdom spirit express itself in the philosophical drama of Job, the pessimistic reflections of Ecclesiastes, the mellow exhortations of Jesus the son of Sirach, the spiritual depth and beauty of the prose-poems of the Wisdom of Solomon.

For the purpose of this study, only one book out of the rich variety of Chokmah literature will claim our attention, the book of Proverbs. A collection of writings, the work of many hands and various centuries, it may cast back, through some of its simple, homely maxims, to the earlier days of the monarchy, while parts of its two closing chapters may bring it as far down as the third or second century B.C. Even if its compass be much shorter and more compressed, there are few who would deny that in its various sections it is the product both of pre-exilic and post-exilic times, and is thus the offspring, not only of different centuries, but of different historical situations.

Great as is the inherent interest of Proverbs, the interest is enhanced when the book is seen to have not only temporal

relations with different centuries and historical epochs, but also wide-reaching geographical links. The sapiental writings of the Hebrews are now recognised to be part of a wider literature that was common to the ancient East. The moral precepts of the book of Proverbs, its didactic tone, its sterling common-sense, its picturesque folk-sayings, find their counterpart in the Wisdom literature of Egypt, the Teaching for Meri-Ka-re, the Wisdom of Anii, and the teaching of Amen-em-ope. The Babylonian Job is said to have striking similarities in some essential points with the Hebrew book of Job, and the Bilingual Book of Proverbs with the Proverbs of the Old Testament. With the latter, too, the Proverbs of Achikar have points of contact.<sup>1</sup> We have, as W.O.E. Oesterley says, "well over

1.

Illustrative Material.From O.T. Proverbs.From Egyptian Wisdom.

It is discretion in a man to  
restrain his anger,  
And it is his glory to for-  
give transgression.  
19, 11.

Be not angry; to be friendly is good.  
Let the memory of thee abide because  
of thy lovingkindness.

Teaching for Meri-Ka-re.

For the lips of a strange  
woman drop honey,  
And her mouth is smoother  
than oil....  
Remove thy way far from her,  
And come not nigh the door of  
her house.  
5, v.3, 8.

Beware of the strange woman, who is  
not known in her city. Ogle her not  
and have no intercourse with her.  
She is a deep expanse of water, and  
her turning is not known.

Wisdom of Anii.

Lying lips are an abomination  
to Jahweh,  
But they that deal truly are  
his delight.  
12, 22.

Speak not to a man in falsehood,  
The abomination of God;  
Sever not thy heart from thy tongue,  
That all thy ways may be prosperous.  
Teaching of Amen-em-ope.

(continued on p.4)

a hundred instances of community<sup>of</sup>/thought, and at times something more, between passages in Proverbs and sayings from other Wisdom books, which are extra-Israelite. In reading these it is impossible to get away from the conviction that the whole of this material, Hebraic and non-Hebraic, belongs, in its essence, to one

### Illustrative Material (contd. from p.3)

#### From O.T. Proverbs.

A man's goings are of Jahweh,  
How then can man understand his  
way?  
20,24.

He that hideth hatred is of  
lying lips;  
And he that uttereth a slander  
is a fool.  
10,18.

Lust not after her beauty in  
thine heart;  
Neither let her take thee with  
her eyelids.  
6,25.

Wealth gotten in haste shall  
be diminished,  
But he that gathereth slowly  
shall have increase.  
13,11.

#### From Babylonian Wisdom.

Who the minds of the gods in  
heaven can learn?  
The counsel of God full of  
subtlety who can comprehend?  
Babylonian Book of Job.

Slander shalt thou not speak, nor  
counsel which is not sure;  
He that maketh gossip, despised is  
his head.  
Nor shalt thou deal in slander,  
but speak what is pure.  
Evil shalt thou not utter, but  
say what is good.  
Of him that dealeth with slander,  
speaking evil,  
Shamash shall wait for his head  
with recompense.  
Babylonian Book of Proverbs.

My son, go not after the beauty of  
a woman,  
And lust not after her in thine  
heart.  
Proverbs of Achikar.

Better is poverty that gathereth,  
than wealth that scattereth.  
Proverbs of Achikar.

These quotations are taken from The Book of Proverbs, J.O.E. Oesterley. (Selected from pp.37-53, Introduction.)

and the same mould; in other words, that the Wisdom Literature of the Hebrews formed a part of the much larger Wisdom Literature of the ancient east as a whole."<sup>1</sup>

The resemblances between the Wisdom literature of Palestine, Egypt and Babylon go further than individual cases of parallelism of thought or language. The writings of the wise men of the ancient East are at one in their belief in the value of moral instruction and detailed maxims of conduct, these being couched sometimes in the form of homely proverbs, and sometimes in polished gnome or apothegm. The graphic speech of the Oriental market-place underwent a double change through the work of the Wise men. It was transformed, on the one hand, into literature that has been prized not only by the countries that gave it birth, but by other lands as well, and, on the other hand, it became an ethical force of real value in steadying and deepening the moral life and habits of the people. So interested were the Wise in this type of pedagogical philosophy, that they were not content simply with studying the moral maxims of their respective motherlands. The Egyptian scholar familiarised himself with the proverbs of Hebrew literature,

---

1. The Book of Proverbs. W.O.E. Oesterley. p.53 (Introduction).



and the Jew borrowed from the Wisdom books of Babylon and Egypt.<sup>1</sup>

Interest in morality, and the desire to educate the people by means of ethical instruction cut across national boundaries. They were real factors in the cultural life of Western Asia for more than two thousand years before the Christian era.<sup>2</sup>

Not only were Western Asia and North Africa affected by the Wisdom spirit. A similar phenomenon manifested itself in the

---

1. "When, for example, an un-Hebraic thought occurs in a Hebrew saying, a parallel to which is found in an Egyptian saying, doubt as to who is the borrower can hardly arise; so that in such a saying as occurs in Prov. 16, 11 it is quite obvious that the Hebrew is indebted to the Egyptian sage. Conversely, in the case of Prov. 20, 9 it is pretty evident that the Egyptian is indebted to the Hebrew sage....." (In the) Teaching of Amen-em-ope, "for a variety of reasons, we are forced to the conclusion that the Hebrew sage has made copious use of the Egyptian Wisdom book..... The Syriac form of Achikar is late, and it seems certain that in its present form it owes much to Proverbs; but even so there is overwhelming proof that it belongs originally to a time long anterior to Proverbs, as now constituted; and that there are instances of parallelism which suggest that the Hebrew sage utilized the Babylonian book."

The Book of Proverbs. W.O.E. Oesterley. pp. 54, 55.  
(Introduction)

2. Of the various national forms of Wisdom literature, the Egyptian is the oldest, the Teaching of Ptah-hotep dating as far back as "about the middle of the third millennium B.C., possibly even earlier". (Ibid. p. 34, Introduction.) At the other end of the chronological scale, Jewish Wisdom literature extends to long after the exile. Even if attention be confined to the canonical books, it is possible that there may be sections in these that come as far down as the second century B.C. The Wisdom spirit had a long ancestry and an enduring life.

Far East, in China. In this case, however, there was no question of borrowing. In the time of Confucius, China was completely cut off from the West.<sup>1</sup> The deserts, steppes and mountain ranges that protected her on the north, west and south, were a well-nigh impassable barrier, that blocked the way of cultural influences from India or Western Asia. On the east and south, she was shut in by the ocean. The ideographic form of her language, moreover, that is still her despair - so difficult is it for her four hundred and fifty millions to acquire - and her glory - so rich is the wealth of meaning that attaches to each character - proved a formidable barrier, rendering difficult the reception of influences from other lands. Yet the interesting fact remains that in the sixth, fifth, and fourth centuries B.C. the scholars of China were adumbrating a type of ethical thought that was akin to that held by the wise men of Palestine. There were, as will be shown later, differences between the Tao ( 道 ) of China and the Chokmah ( חכמה ) of Palestine, striking dissimilarities between the Analects of Confucius and the book of Proverbs, but many as these were, they cannot hide the broad similarity of tone and spirit between the ethical teaching of the Jewish sages and that of the leading figure in Chinese thought, Confucius.

---

1. Not for some four hundred years after the birth of Confucius was China to have intercourse with the West. In the reign of Wu Ti (140-86 B.C.) China came in touch with Parthia, Mesopotamia, and the great dynasties of Bactria and Afganistan. "An attempt was made to reach India by way of Yunnan, and Hindoo missionaries, for the first time, found their way to China. The Roman Empire became known to the Chinese, and was referred to by the name of Ts'in." (A Sketch of Chinese History. F.L. Hawks Pott. p.40.)

<sup>1</sup> The Wise men of the Hebrews had an enthusiasm for moral, righteous living. So had Confucius, although, as befits the sober cast of the Chinese mind, his passion was expressed for the most part in restrained fashion. The sages, alike of the Near and the Far East, were convinced that right thinking and right living were correlatives. Wisdom and ethics were inseparably connected. These, moreover, were linked with something greater than the fleeting life of man; they were bound up with the essentially rational and moral character of the universe, and of the spirit that lay behind it. In that spirit lay a power that made for righteousness. In defining and describing that power, the Wise men of Palestine went much further than Confucius did in personalising it. While they spoke of Jahveh (יהוה) or Elohim (אלהים), Confucius preferred to use the term T'ien (天) or Heaven. Both, however, were alike in a certain sobriety and restraint that characterised their religious attitude. The vivid, childlike sense of God and the firm belief in His communication of His will to man - a belief prominent both in the folk-stories of the Hebrews and the early literature of the Chinese - were not so marked either in Proverbs or the Analects.

Life, alike to the Wisdom thought of Palestine and China, presented itself in very practical guise, as a fact not primarily to be thought about, but to be lived. Life could best be regarded as a sphere of relationships, between person and person, and between

---

1. From this point, the chapter contains in condensed form a summary of what will be developed at length in later sections of the thesis.

God and man. He who conducted these relationships wisely and well would become possessor of the true wisdom. In his efforts to attain this end, he would find that moral instruction, as received from the lips of a wise teacher, had a great part to play.

So convinced was Confucius of this last point, that he founded a school for the propagation of his doctrines, a school which attracted many students, who in after years were to perpetuate the teaching of their Master. At this point, it is not possible to say whether or not a comparison can be made between the philosopher teachers of China and the Chākamim of Palestine. We do not know whether the Wise were regular teachers in the sense that Confucius and his disciples were. Their influence, however, must have been considerable, whether mediated through their oral teaching or their writings. In that respect, at least, there must be points of resemblance between the Confucian scholars of the Middle Kingdom and the Wise men of the Jewish people.

Nor was the outward setting of their lives altogether different - although here dogmatism is impossible owing to our ignorance of the exact times at which the various sections of Proverbs came into being. The book certainly has for its background the stirring life of some of the most formative centuries of Jewish history. Round the little state surged a maelstrom of political crises. The comparatively peaceful days of the undivided kingdom were followed by the division into Judah and Israel, the fall of the latter, the capture of Jerusalem, the exile and return, and the problems raised by the infiltration of Greek thought and influence.

Some at least of the writers or editors of Proverbs must have been exposed to political events that taxed all their faith in God and man. The historical background of Confucius' life was equally disturbed. Mencius paints a dark picture of it. "The world faced decay and principles of right government faded away. Perverse speaking and oppressive deeds again became rife. There were instances of ministers who murdered their sovereigns, and of sons who murdered their fathers."<sup>1</sup> "During the period of 'Spring and Autumn' (770-484 B.C.) there were thirty-six regicides. There were also numberless dominicides, parricides, assassinations, murders, and usurpations for the sake of wealth or power or pleasure..... During the latter part of his life Confucius.... came into personal contact with many scores of princes and political leaders. (He) witnessed revolutionary movements on every hand."<sup>2</sup> It was amid turbulent, chaotic scenes such as these that Confucius uttered the calm, high-toned maxims of the Lun Yü ( 論語 ).

Some two hundred and sixty-six years after the death of Confucius, a determined effort was made by Ch'in Shih Huang to eradicate Confucian influence by the burning of his works. The continued existence of the literary and philosophical tradition which "the Master" had established hung by a thread. It survived the ordeal. In later centuries Confucianism had other difficulties to meet. It was said to lack the glamour, the religious appeal or

---

1. Mencius, bk.3, pt.2, ch. 9, quoted by L.S. Hsu. The Political Philosophy of Confucianism, p.9

2. L.S. Hsu. The Political Philosophy of Confucianism, p.9

the metaphysical range of Buddhism. Yet it maintained its hold. A not altogether dissimilar situation arose in Palestine in the centuries preceding the Christian era. From 332 onwards, when Alexander the Great invaded Asia Minor, Hebraic thought had to meet the onslaught of Hellenism. What chance had the religious literature of a tiny country against the magnificent, cultural inheritance of Greece? The homely counsels, the narrow ethics of home and farm and street, as expressed in the book of Proverbs might well have seemed to not a few Jews, dazzled by the brilliance of Greek thought, but poor fare in comparison with the philosophy of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle.<sup>1</sup> Yet Hebrew thought survived. The Wisdom literature held its own. The book of Proverbs, like the Analects of Confucius, continued its formative work in moulding character, thought and life.

---

1. This thought of the struggle between Hebraic and Hellenic literature and culture is elaborated in W.A.L. Elmslie's *Studies in Life from Jewish Proverbs*, chapter 5, pp.75-99.

## CHAPTER 2.

### A Discussion and Comparison of The Backgrounds of the Book of Proverbs and the Analects of Confucius.

---

## CHAPTER 2.

A Discussion and Comparison of the Backgrounds  
of the Book of Proverbs and the Analects of Confucius.

## 1.

Before any systematic, detailed endeavour is made to compare the book of Proverbs and the Analects of Confucius, it is essential that one should understand something of the difficulties lying in the way of such a comparison. The main obstacle is that of the seeming impossibility of discovering the exact meaning of the fundamental terms employed in the two books. For example, the English word 'Wisdom' is used to translate both the Chinese ideogram

知 and the Hebrew חָכְמָה . Can one then assume that the two Oriental words, translated by the selfsame English term, meant exactly the same thing, and that 'chih' suggested to the Chinese sage what 'chokmah' meant to the wise men of Palestine? If not, what was the difference? It might appear a comparatively simple matter to say what 'chih' meant since Confucius himself proffered a definition, "To devote oneself earnestly to one's duty to humanity and, while respecting the spirits, to avoid them, may be called Wisdom."<sup>1</sup> When, however, one compares this conception with that held in Palestine, against what definition in Proverbs will one set it? With the lyrical passages in the earlier chapters where Wisdom is personified, or with the detailed statements in the later

---

1. Analects, 6,20. (Hereafter, when quotations are made from the Analects, only the numbers of the book and chapter will be given, and the word 'Analects' will be omitted.)



chapters about the specific ways in which the wise man acts? In neither case would the attempted comparison be a just one. It is not possible to compare poetry with philosophy, nor a principle with one isolated application of it.

Again, it will be found that there is, as a rule, a difference between the line of approach of Hebrew and Chinese thinkers. The Wise men of Palestine tend more to inductive thought, and Confucius to deductive. While in the greater part of the book of Proverbs the writers prefer to give concrete illustrations of general principles, Confucius rather subsumes detailed maxims of conduct under one all-embracing category. Is this difference of approach due to a fundamental dissimilarity between the Hebrew and Chinese mind? Or can it be accounted for by the respective origins of the books under discussion - in the one case, a collection of the proverbs of the people, and in the other, a compendium of the maxims of a philosopher? Is it a mere accidental difference of literary technique, or does it signify something radical that affects the conceptions discussed?

To take another difficulty - terms are sometimes used in one book that are absent in the other. Does this mean that there is no corresponding idea? Or that the idea has as little value to the people concerned as its lack of mention would seem to suggest? The word 'virtue', for example, occurs again and again in the *Apalects* and only twice in Proverbs.<sup>1</sup> Does this mean that the

---

1. In connection with the virtuous woman. 31,10; 12,4.

Jewish mind had little place for virtue in its scheme of things?  
 Or is the righteous man of Proverbs synonymous with the virtuous man  
 of the Lun Yü? and Is there a Hebrew equivalent for the superior  
 man (chün tsu 君子) of the Analects?

The difficulty raised by such questions reaches its maximum  
 in regard to the word 'God'. The terms 'God' and 'the Lord' which  
 occur ninety-seven times in Proverbs are not mentioned once by Con-  
 fucius in the Analects.<sup>1</sup> In the first fifteen books,<sup>2</sup> however,  
 there are eleven references to Heaven,<sup>3</sup> two to the laws of Heaven,<sup>4</sup>  
 and one to the will of Heaven.<sup>5,6</sup> Did Confucius mean by 'Heaven'  
 what the Jews meant by 'God'?

These problems practically all resolve themselves into that  
 of the fundamental meaning of the terms used respectively by the  
 scholars of Palestine and China. If one could succeed in discovering  
 the real significance of the key-words of their writings, the main  
 obstacle in the way of a comparative study of their work would be  
 overcome.

Words and ideas, however, are not counters that can be  
 viewed in isolation from their surroundings. They are living things,  
 growing in a particular climate, having roots in a specific soil. If  
 one is to understand aright the thought-forms used by Jewish and

1. 'God' is mentioned in 20,1 but the reference occurs in a  
 quotation from the Shu Ching.
2. The last five books are regarded by recent critics as doubtful.
3. 3,13; 3,24; 6,26; 7,22; 8,19; 9,5; 9,6; 9,11; 11,8;  
 12,5; 14,37;
4. 2,4; 5,12.
5. 6,8.
6. In the last five books, the Divine Will is referred to in 16,8  
 and the Divine Law in 20,3.

Chinese sages, one must first obtain some knowledge of the philosophical and cultural conditions that lay behind their writings. Only when the background is visualised can one assess at its true value the worth of what lies in front. In endeavouring, then, to solve the problems raised in a comparative study of Proverbs and the Analects, one will make no headway if attention be confined to these two books. It will be necessary to extend one's view further back into the past, to examine the roots from which the Wisdom literature of Palestine and China grew, and to discover something of the cultural, literary and religious heritage which the wise men of Jewish birth and the scholars of Confucius' time inherited. Only when this is done will it be possible to gain some idea of the meaning of the main conceptions on which the Wisdom writers of Eastern and Western Asia based their philosophy of life.

---

## (2)

The Background of the Book of Proverbs.

In view of our ignorance as to the exact centuries during which the various sections of Proverbs were written, it is not easy to write in categorical terms about the background of the book. It is impossible to distinguish clearly where background ends and foreground begins. There are scholars who regard the book as late, and who see in the main central sections of it (and still more in the introduction) marks of the point of view of the Persian and even the Greek period of Jewish history. On the other hand, there are those who regard its collections of proverbs as probably the work of the ninth century, and who consider it not impossible that there are hints and echoes of Solomon's time in the book.<sup>1</sup> If a middle position be adopted, such as that of Oesterley, the main collections - ch. 10-22, v.16 and ch. 25-29 - would be regarded as having been compiled not later, at any rate, than 700 B.C. What, then, was the cultural environment of that time? When the leaders of thought wrote the great words with which Proverbs is filled, the Lord, righteousness, wisdom, what connotation did they give to these words, inherited from a rich and still living past?

The Wise men would be cognizant of the oral traditions of their land, its songs, its literature, its laws. They would know the folk-tales of the country, as written down in the J and E collections, with their vivid, detailed accounts of God's dealings

---

1. The question of the date of Proverbs will be discussed in Chap.3.

with the patriarchs, and the wanderings of the children of Israel in the wilderness.<sup>1</sup> The Wise would have gained from their study of these collections more than mere knowledge of those of whom the stories told. Something of the religious depth and power of the tales must have woven itself into their consciousness. Speaking of the J and E collections, Dr. Welch says, "The faith which they embody is that of a nation which...is reconciled with life, because behind its effort is the will of God, whom it serves with a happy and whole-hearted allegiance.... There is the quiet sincerity of men who are reconciled with life because they believe themselves in the hands of One whom they serve with a complete allegiance and who means well with them. Men are still only conscious of the liberty and enlargement which this sense of having to do with a mightier will than their own brings with it; they have not yet learned either their own impotence to fulfil all the demands of Jahveh, or the inward conflict which such an effort brings with it. Abraham receives a revelation and is competent to fulfil it all. The demand is simple and outward: the response is instant and complete. Man's will is free and strong enough to do what his God requires."<sup>2</sup> When the Wise compiled 'the proverbs of Solomon', they had, to their sorrow, discovered that man's will was also free and strong enough to do what his God forbade. Yet their deeper knowledge of human

---

1. "I believe the two separate accounts of J and E were written under the early kingdom, possibly even under the united kingdom, and were united as JE, while the Northern kingdom still existed. More definitely than this it seems impossible to date them."  
 (The Religion of Israel under the Kingdoms). Adam C. Welch.  
 2. Ibid. pp.27,28. p.12, Intro.)

nature cannot but have had an inner core of nobility and sweetness whose life was derived from the simple trustful faith of the J and E collections.

The Wise would also know the later stories of the men who won and held Palestine - the collection which forms the original nucleus of the book of Judges. The ancient songs of the land would be known to them - the short fragment of Miriam's song (Ex. 15,1), the song of Deborah (Judges 5), the blessing of Jacob (Gen. 49 - a product, possibly, of Davidic times or the time of the division of the kingdom, but which may have elements that date back to earlier days), and the lament of David for Saul and Jonathan (2 Sam. 1, 19-27). They would be conversant with the history of David's family and court, as given in 2 Sam. 9-20.

The Law as contained in the Book of the Covenant, Ex.20-24, formed part of their heritage, and certain of the prophets must have made their mark on them. They would doubtless be familiar with the life and work of Elijah. "No prophet, it may almost be said no character in the Old Testament, made such an impression upon posterity as he."<sup>1</sup> By their time, or at least by the time of some of the Wise, Amos' fiery words would have been put in writing, and Hosea would have written the tragic story of his home-life, and the wonderful truths he had learnt of God through it. Isaiah, too, may have flashed across their ken, and left his

---

1. The Biblical History of the Hebrews. F.J. Foakes-Jackson, p. 236. On p.232, Foakes-Jackson speaks of Elijah as "the greatest and boldest of all the prophets of Israel".

impress on their thinking. Micah's words may have been known to them. Their literary inheritance was no small one. What religious and intellectual conceptions would they acquire with and from it?

The most outstanding characteristic of this literature is the central place that it gives to God. God, and not man, is the subject. Man is shown in his relationship to God, rather than God in His relationship to man. The earth is regarded not so much as the home of man, as the product of God's creative activity, the scene on which He displays His power. What were the characteristics of this God Who was so vividly portrayed in the early literature?

The conception of God that is presented is strongly anthropomorphic in character. God is depicted as leaving His mountain home, and coming down to the haunts of men.<sup>1</sup> He walks in the garden with Adam, with whom he engages in conversation.<sup>2</sup> He smells the fragrance of the sacrifice which Noah offers.<sup>3</sup> He visits Abraham at the door of his tent,<sup>4</sup> and wrestles with Jacob.<sup>5</sup> When Moses, Aaron and the elders of Israel went up 'unto Jahveh', they saw, apparently, "not merely a manifestation of God, but Jahveh himself visibly present".<sup>6</sup> In the later story in a subsequent chapter, where a more developed point of view is

---

1. Judges, 5,4. (The Song of Deborah)  
 2. Gen. 3, 8-10. {J}  
 3. " 8, 21. {J}  
 4. " 18,1. {J}  
 5. " 32, 24-30. (JE, or perhaps almost wholly J)  
 6. Ex.24,10. (E) The Origin and Growth of Religion as Illustrated by the Religion of the Ancient Hebrews. C.G. Montefiore, D. 41

shown in the words, "There can no man see me and live", it is nevertheless still assumed that God possesses hand, face and back.<sup>1</sup> This strong anthropomorphism influences the conception held of God's mind and heart. He thinks and feels, loves and hates, is surprised and grieved. He changes His plans.<sup>2</sup> He - to borrow Wellhausen's phrase - has unaccountable moods.<sup>3</sup> He commands David to take a census, and then punishes the people for the sin which He Himself has instigated.<sup>4</sup> With the passing of time, however, the wheat and the tares that originally grew together in this anthropomorphic field became clearly distinguishable. The pettiness, the caprice, the incalculable features which the early writers had accepted without question as part of the nature of God withered and died away, and His character was seen to be consistent and calculable, unified, as Amos showed, by His righteousness, and, as Hosea added, by His love.

On the activity of God much stress is placed. The sphere of His action is wide as the world. Now He is engaged in the mighty work of creation,<sup>5</sup> and now He is making His will known to man in his sleep.<sup>6</sup> It is He who ensures victory on the field of battle<sup>7</sup> and it is He who enables a woman to conceive.<sup>8</sup> Now

---

1. Ex. 33, 21-23 (J)

2. Gen. 6, 5-7. (J)

3. Quoting Montefiore, The Origin and Growth of Religion, as Illustrated by the Religion of the Ancient Hebrews, p.38.

4. 2 Sam. 24, 1.

5. Gen. 2, 4-25 (J)

6. Gen. 15, 12-17 (Probably JE)

7. Judges 4, 14 and 15.

8. Gen. 20, 17(E), 21, 1 and 2 (J), 25, 21 and 22 (J)



He is using wind and star and rain to achieve His purpose,<sup>1</sup> and now he brings to a successful issue the mission of a serving-man.<sup>2</sup> "This Will is not recognised as a mere intervention in the course of the world, or known through the difference between what it brings to pass and the ordinary events of life. God reveals His will in a course of events, of which man is the reverent spectator, not in any single event which stamps itself as divine through standing apart in quality or character from the rest of life."<sup>3</sup>

The sphere, above all, in which God manifests Himself is that of the human soul. In the J and E collections, for one reference to God's power as displayed in storm or tempest, in unusual prodigy or cataclysmic event, there must be any number that bear witness to the fact that God spake to such and such a man. With the patriarchs He is represented as having the closest connection. He guides and comforts them; He praises and rebukes them. Abraham is known as His friend, and of Moses it is said that God spoke with him face to face. With lesser figures too, outwith the main stream of what was in later centuries to flow into definite Jewish history, God also comes in contact, with Hagar the bondwoman,<sup>4</sup> Lot whom He twice saves from death,<sup>5</sup> and Laban.<sup>6</sup> He chooses people of no special rank or position to be

---

1. Judges 5, 20, and 21 (Song of Deb.)

2. Gen. 24, 12-15 (Prob. JE)

3. The Religion of Israel under the Kingdom. Adam C. Welch, pp. 27-28

4. Gen. 21, 9-21 (E)

5. " 19, 1-28 (J)

6. " 31, 24 (E)

His instruments, Deborah and Barak, Gideon, Samuel. When in later days kings occupy the centre of the stage, the religious interest often passes from the centre to the wings, where stands some soul sensitive to the spirit of God. It not infrequently happens that when a king comes face to face with some simple man through whom God speaks, it is the king who admits the supremacy of the prophet, and the pretensions of royalty go down before the majesty of righteousness.<sup>1</sup> Thus David acknowledges his guilt before Nathan,<sup>2</sup> Jeroboam admits the superior power of an unknown man of God,<sup>3</sup> Ahab cowers before Elijah,<sup>4</sup> and Hezekiah leans on the strength of Isaiah.<sup>5</sup> It did not matter whether a man were king or slave: provided that God's choice had fallen on him, and that he had responded to the Divine voice, any human soul might provide the medium for the Divine revelation.<sup>6</sup>

1. "Politically Israel, perhaps alone among the nations of the ancient East, preserved much of that democratic spirit which marks the shepherd tribes. It seems that the monarchy was limited, in that a definite 'covenant' was made at the accession of each king, laying down the terms on which he held his power. Israel recognised no distinction in status between one freeman and another; all (including the king) were 'brethren'. We find no trace of a noble order here, such as we find in Mesopotamia and Egypt." (Hebrew Religion, its Origin and Development. W.O.E. Oesterley and T.H. Robinson. p.183.)

2. 2 Sam. 12, 1-15.

3. 1 Kings, 13, 1-10.

4. 1 Kings, 21, 17-29.

5. Isaiah, 37, 1-7; 38, 1-8.

6. This sense that the Divine call might be heard by any man not only was a preservative against monarchical absolutism, but also protected the Hebrews from priestly tyranny. As Montefiore says, "The Yahveh of the priest was also the Yahveh of the layman. There is no trace of any esoteric priestly doctrine kept back from society at large. The business of Israel's teachers is to communicate their knowledge of Yahveh to his people: neither they nor the prophets are familiar with the idea that the highest conceptions of Yahveh and his religion need be limited to the possession of a few." (The Origin and Growth of Religion. pp.104-105.)

The God who thus comes into intimate relationship with individual lives is also the Lord of nations.<sup>1</sup> The early J and E collections that give the Hebrew conception of the first beginnings of human history are animated by a universalistic spirit that regards man quā man. Cognizance has to be taken of the various ethnic groups into which humanity is divided, and an effort is made to depict God in His relation to these.<sup>2</sup>

Of all the races and peoples on the earth, there is one that is linked with God in a special way - so the Hebrew writers think - and that race is their own. This idea is expressed not in abstract language, but in vivid folk-tales that tell how God assured Abraham,<sup>3</sup> Jacob,<sup>4</sup> Moses,<sup>5</sup> and Joshua<sup>6</sup> of a glorious future for their descendants.

1. It is a commonplace of anthropological and sociological study that consciousness of the group or the tribe comes before the discovery of the individual. It was the new-found realization of Israel as a kingdom which in part led to the compilation of the J and E collections with their vivid sense of God's manifestation of Himself to the fathers of their people.

2. Gen.10,8-19,v.21, and 24-30(J). "The true character of the lists may be seen quite clearly from many of the names, which are names of countries (e.g. Cush, Mizraim, Ophir), or cities (e.g. Tarshish, Zidon), or peoples (e.g. Ludim). It is an attempt to explain the origin of the various nations, before the author proceeds to the special ancestry of Israel." (Commentary. A.S.Peake. p.145.)

3. Gen.12,v.1,2,7.(J); 13,14-17(J); 15,1-7(JE); 18,18.(J).

4. " 28,13-16. (J).

5. Ex. 3,1-10. (JE).

6. Josh.1,1-9. (JE D : according to Driver in his Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament (p.105) this chapter is based probably upon an earlier and shorter narrative, but in its form in Joshua is the work of D2.

While the idea of Israel's special relationship with God remains a constant factor in Hebrew thought, the meaning and signification of her destiny change with the centuries. The early idea that Israel was, as it were, God's favourite child,<sup>1</sup> to be protected and gifted with material blessings, comes, in later years, into sharp conflict with the painful facts of her history. Emphasis is then laid on the conceptions of discipline and punishment - thoughts which give a pronounced colour to the account of the wanderings of the children of Israel in the wilderness, and which form the motif of the book of Judges, with its refrain<sup>2</sup> of apostasy, punishment, repentance, deliverance. How strongly the idea of punishment influenced the best thought of the Hebrew world, is seen in the account of the theophany as given in 1 Kings, 19.<sup>3</sup> When the message of the Lord

1. "It is plain that a great part of Israel imagined, like their heathen neighbours, that Jehovah had need of them as much as they had need of Him, that their worship and service could not be indifferent to Him, that He must, by a natural necessity, exert His power against their enemies and save His sanctuaries from profanation. This indeed was the constant contention of the prophets who opposed Micah and Jeremiah (Micah, 3, 11; Jer., 7, 4 seq., 27, 1 seq.); and from their point of view, the captivity of Judah was the final and hopeless collapse of the religion of Jehovah."  
(The Old Testament in the Jewish Church. W. Robertson Smith. pp. 272-273.)
2. The theological and literary framework in which the book of Judges is cast, is the work of the Deuteronomic editor, who built his framework round the early material dealing with the conquest. He would be posterior to the year 700, which we have adopted as an approximate date by which time the central sections of Proverbs would have been formed. The ideas which he schematises were familiar to the generations before him.
3. "The narratives of Elijah and Elisha appear to have been incorporated by the compiler without substantial alteration."  
(Introduction, Driver. p. 196.)

is given to Elijah, it is a message, not of comfort, but of judgment. Since Israel has broken her covenant with God, "him that escapeth from the sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay; and him that escapeth from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay". Equally condemnatory is Amos, who, after his measured, cumulative denunciation of the iniquities of foreign lands, completes the arraignment with God's judgment on Israel. "For three transgressions of Judah .....for three transgressions of Israel, and for four I will not turn away the punishment thereof."<sup>1</sup> "The wounded love of God, who has spent so much and whose patience is at last exhausted, must now make its way in the destruction of the nation which has failed Him."<sup>2</sup> But if dire calamity is to fall on the land as a punishment for the sins of the people, what will become of the special purpose for which God has called Israel? So even in the stern judgment which Elijah hears on Mount Horeb, there is a note of quiet confidence - "Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal".<sup>3</sup> That 'yet' is the seed from which the developed doctrine of a remnant would afterwards grow, and for the conception of a righteous people who, by means of their suffering and agony would be the better able to work out God's will. It was not until centuries had passed, and the exile had left its mark on the outward fortunes and the inmost thoughts of the Jews, that this fuller, deeper thought

---

1. Amos, 2,4 and 6.

2. The Religion of Israel under the Kingdom. Adam Welch. p.85.

3. 1 Kings, 19,18.

was developed, of suffering, not as a punishment, but as a privilege. By that time, however, the main sections of the book of Proverbs, (10-22, v.16 and 23-29, and probably also 21, v.17-24) were, almost certainly, already compiled, and it is the earlier view of suffering as a punishment which pervades its sapiential maxims.

In Hebrew thinking on the significance of the connection between God and Israel, change is also seen in another respect. The thought of Jahveh as the God of Israel gradually developed into the thought of God as Sovereign Lord of the whole world. The stage of henotheism is followed by that of monotheism. The exclusive conception of God as One Who is concerned only with the Hebrew nation, or with other nations in a loose and external way, is succeeded by the thought of One Who metes out punishment alike to Ammon and to Judah,<sup>1</sup> Who chastises Moab for cruelty vented on Edom,<sup>2</sup> and Who brings the Philistines and the Syrians from their lands of bondage as He brings the Israelites from Egypt.<sup>3,4</sup> In statements such as these, the thought is implicit which, in later days, will develop into the conception of God as the acknowledge Lord of the peoples of all

1. Amos, 1,13; 2,4.

2. " 2,1.

3. " 9,7.

4. It is not without significance that Amos does not once use the expression 'the God of Israel'. (His nearest approach to it is in 4,2 - "Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel".) A favourite name of his is 'Lord God of hosts'.

hands.<sup>1</sup>

In part, doubtless, it was their understanding of the moral nature of God's being which led the prophets to adumbrate the doctrine of His universal sway. To Amos belongs the distinction of being the first to develop, in a detailed and circumstantial way, the thought of the moral sovereignty of God. He was, however, far from being the first to glimpse the idea of God as a moral Being. The thought was present, in germ at least, from an early date. "From the earliest days", says Wheeler Robinson, "at which the national history can be said to have begun, i.e. from Sinai, it is justifiable to claim that a moral relation existed between Yahweh and Israel".<sup>2</sup>

God, it was felt, was not only a God to be worshipped, of a God to Whom sacrifices were to be paid, but He was also a God Whose commandments were to be kept. The conception of God was inextricably linked with the words, 'Thou shalt' or 'Thou shalt not'. In

---

1. "The growth of the universalist conception", says Montefiore, "is a puzzling problem and difficult to trace. The initial step would seem to have been a desire that other nations should recognize the power and divinity of Yahveh, and the unreality of their own gods. At first this recognition is conceived merely as an outward fact, and not as an inward blessing; its aim is the increase of Yahveh's reputation and Israel's, not yet the diffusion of truth or the spiritual welfare of humanity" - e.g. Is. 18,7 - ... "Complete universalism is only then attained when the nations are conceived as converted to Israel's God for their own benefit and edification. The interval from the former stages to this further and fuller conception seems also, at least once, to have been traversed by Isaiah." Is. 19,19-25. (The Origin and Growth of Religion as Illustrated by the Religion of the Ancient Hebrews. pp.146, 147.) If the fragment in Is. 2,2-4 and Mic. 4,1-4 belongs to one or other of these prophets, one can see how far thought had travelled by the eighth century.

2. The Religious Ideas of the Old Testament. H. Wheeler Robinson, p.38.

primitive times, the Divine commands or prohibitions were often connected with matters of custom or ritual, but these did not exhaust the range of Jahveh's sway. Moral requirements accompanied ritual enactments. "The Book of the Covenant (Ex.20,22-23,19), which may fairly be placed under the early monarchy, is far from being simply a ritualistic code of laws. It is indeed surprising to find how many of the moral demands of the great prophets are here, in principle, already required by Yahweh from Israel: the generous treatment of the slave, the 'stranger', the widow and orphan, the debtor and the poor; impartial and incorruptible equity in the administration of justice; proper regard for parents; even the duty of driving back an enemy's stray cattle. Clearly the God who requires such conduct from his people is already possessed in their eyes of a pronounced moral character."<sup>1</sup> With the coming of Amos, this thought of the moral demands of religion became deeper in intensity and wider in range. "Let judgement roll down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream." "Seek good, and not evil, that ye may live: and so the Lord, the God of hosts, shall be with you, as ye say. Hate the evil, and love the good, and establish judgement in the gate."<sup>2</sup> By the time of Micah, the thought of the indissoluble connection between God and morality had become so clear, that it could be expressed in the pregnant words, "What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"<sup>3</sup> Summing up

---

1. The Religious Ideas of the Old Testament. H.Wheeler Robinson.  
p.66.

2. Amos 5,24; 5,14 and 15.

3. Micah 6,8.



the matter, Wellhausen says, "What Jehovah demands is righteousness, nothing more and nothing less; what He hates is injustice. Sin or offence to the Deity is a thing of purely moral character. Morality is that for the sake of which all other things exist, it is the alone essential thing in the world. It is no postulate, no idea, but at once a necessity and a fact; the most intensely living of personal powers - Jehovah the God of Israel."<sup>1</sup> It took centuries for the Hebrews to come to a deep understanding of the meaning of righteousness, but from first to last the idea was present that Jahveh had the right to issue commands and prohibitions, which it was the duty of His people to obey. Consequently, the Hebrew idea of the meaning of righteousness developed *pari passu* with its conception of God.<sup>2</sup>

A God whose inmost being was righteousness and righteousness alone, might conceivably be a God from Whom men would flee in terror, rather than a God who drew all men to Himself. It is the merit of Hosea that he accompanied Amos' trenchant emphasis on the righteousness of God with the twin-truth of God's love. "Hosea, first of all the prophets, rises to the sublime height of calling the affection with which Jehovah regards His people, love. No prophet had named

---

1. Hist. p.472, quoted in Biblical and Literary Essays.  
(A.B. Davidson, p.119.)

2. The significance of this is more apparent when it is realised that there is no necessary connection between religion and righteousness. "In Greece", for example, says Wheeler Robinson, "the trend of thought was very different. Morality was conceived in relation to the human rather than to the divine personality. Its characteristic note was not obedience, but harmony; the realisation of an ideal of due proportion, a conformity to nature as against convention." (The Religious Ideas of the Old Testament. p. 42.)

such a word before."<sup>1</sup> "When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt."<sup>2</sup> "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely."<sup>3</sup>

To the Western mind, intent on order and classification, and eager to point out the logical connection between one set of facts and another, it would be a congenial task to develop the thesis that it was the varied events of Israel's history which led her to make her successive discoveries about God. It might be argued, for example, that the tragedies of her national life were instrumental in bringing her to a realization of the moral character of her God. Her misfortunes were such - so the Westerner might make the Hebrew line of reasoning to run - that they must be due to her wrong-doing. They were a punishment inflicted on her by God. God, therefore, must be a Being to whom evil is abhorrent. According to this argument, the Hebrew advanced from history to theology, from a study of the temporal to an understanding of the Eternal. It is an understandable position, but it has little or no warrant in Biblical evidence. In writing on this point, A.B. Davidson says, "Historical investigators are never weary asking where or when or how Israel came by its conception of Jehovah; but they fail to elicit an answer from history. They construe the history of Israel with the view of showing how its various turns must have suggested to the people the ideas which they had of their God. In this, however, they directly traverse the consciousness of the people as reflected in their Scriptures; for this

- 
1. Biblical and Literary Essays. A.B. Davidson. p.88.
  2. Hosea, 11.1.
  3. Hosea, 14.4.

consciousness persistently inverts the order of the evolutionists, and always explains events by the conception of Jehovah already possessed".<sup>1</sup>

Along such lines as these one can glimpse the conception of Jehovah held by the leaders of thought of the eighth century, and which, consciously or unconsciously, was in the minds of those who were responsible for the compilation of the book of Proverbs. There was the firm belief in an active, living God who thought and felt and willed. Now His activities were seen in strange, unusual prodigies, now in the normal processes of nature, and now in the hearts and lives of men. For God was not a God who dwelt remote from men and far removed from earth. He was connected in the most intimate fashion with humanity, which He touched most closely through the lives of great men and women, outstanding for their sensitiveness to the influence of His Spirit. Alongside of, and intimately connected with, the thought of God as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, went the thought of the Almighty as the Lord of Israel. In a unique way, He was their God and they were His people, to be trained and disciplined by Him. He was, however, not only the God of Israel, but also the God of Hosts, Lord of lords and King of the whole earth. As the Hebrews' conception of the sweep of His sovereignty extended, so did their understanding deepen of the height and depth of His nature. In His inmost being, He was righteousness and love.

More important, however, than their discoveries of the attributes of God's being, was their vivid sense of the personality of

---

1. Biblical and Literary Essays. p.128.

Him with Whom they were so closely linked. They were dealing not with ideas or postulates or hypotheses, but with a Person, a Divine Being, on Whom their nation's life depended, by Whom they were taught and trained. This was the foundation stone on which were erected Hebrew history and religious thought.

In any discussion of the basic ideas of early Jewish thought, attention must be paid, not only to the seed-thoughts which later flowered into the deeply spiritual truths adumbrated by Amos and Hosea, Isaiah and Jeremiah, but also to the rudimentary and primitive ideas which came to be regarded as incompatible with the higher truths later revealed, and which faded away and died. The pages of the Old Testament are strewn with vestigial remains of earlier beliefs. Jahveh is regarded as but one God out of many: ritual offences, the touching of the ark, contact with an unclean body, are considered as heinous sins, as moral offences. The Semitic belief in Sheol is maintained for long centuries, Sheol being considered "a lugubrious place to which men went when they had finished their ordinary life".<sup>1</sup> There are traces of demonology in the pages of the Bible.<sup>2</sup> "Among the Israelites, judging from the number of direct and indirect references in the Old Testament, Ancestor-worship and the Cult of the Dead must at

---

1. Immortality and the Unseen World. W.O.E. Oesterley. p.6.

2. e.g. "se'irim, lilith (Is.34,14; 13,21), shedim (Deut.32,17; Ps. 106,37), 'Alukah (Prov.30,15); perhaps 'Azazel (Lev.16,8) belongs here."  
(The Religious Ideas of the Old Testament. H. Wheeler Robinson p.47, footnote.)

one time have been widely prevalent."<sup>1</sup> Necromancy had a strong hold on the religious life of the people. "Practically all through the history of Israel, as recorded in the Old Testament, Necromancy was practised in the land, in spite of vigorous efforts to root it out."<sup>2</sup> The interesting fact, however, is not so much the existence in Hebrew religious thought of these primitive beliefs, as the fact that they failed to grow, and finally disappeared. Like scales that grow in the earlier stages of a twig's life along with the bud, they are finally thrown off by the vigour and vitality of the full-grown flower.

What of the means employed by God to educe Hebrew thought to its fullest development? Mention has already been made of the contribution given by the J and E documents, the Book of the Covenant and other early literature; attention has also been drawn to the creative work of the prophets. Nor can the priests be left out of the record. While in later Jewish history the priests were mainly connected with sacrificial rites and ritual ceremonial, in earlier days their work was much wider in range, though less rigid and formal in pattern. Originally, the priests seem to have combined something of the functions of prophet and

1. *Immortality and the Unseen World*. W.O.E.Oesterley. p.98. In his "Hebrew Religion, Its Origin and Development", Oesterley, writing on this question, gives as evidence the fact that many of the ancestral graves were holy sites, and that incense was offered to a departed monarch up to the end of the monarchy. But he admits that in the Semitic domain the subject is a highly controversial one.
2. *Immortality and the Unseen World*. W.O.E.Oesterley. p.131

judge, law-giver, teacher, and , it may be , writer. Guardians of the famous shrines, they took part in sacrificial rites, and celebrated at the main festivals held there. Probably they played a part in writing and compiling the ancient traditions of their people, and in guarding the documents that contained the stories of the patriarchs. Perhaps their most important function was the manipulation of the sacred lot, and they gave judgments in cases of dispute.<sup>1</sup> "Whether as teacher, soothsayer or judge, (the priest) was in each case the interpreter of Yahveh's will, the human mouthpiece of a supernatural revelation."<sup>2</sup> If in the range of his activities, the priest was marked off from the layman, there was not yet the sharp delimitation of the priestly functions which one finds in later days. Any man could sacrifice - or so one would infer from the fact that at Bechim the people sacrificed,<sup>3</sup> and that Manoah and Gideon, Saul and Solomon, all took the chief part in the rite.<sup>4</sup> Nor was the giving of judgment limited to the priests. "Deborah .. judged Israel at that time."<sup>5</sup>

---

1. "At Marah, 'Moses made for the people law and judgment, and there he proved them'; in other words, he judicially settled their disputes. (Ex.15,25.) In the oldest Pentateuchal legislation the sanctuary is the scene of all legal operations."  
(The Origin and Growth of Religion, as Illustrated by the Religion of the Ancient Hebrews. C.G. Montefiore. pp. 68, 69.)

2. The Origin and Growth of Religion, as Illustrated by the Religion of the Ancient Hebrews. C.G. Montefiore. p.67-68.

3. Judges, 2,5.

4. " 13,19; 6,19-21; 1 Sam. 13,8-14; 1 Kings 8,5.

5. " 4,4.

With the passing of the centuries, specialisation took place; the prophets and the 'wise men' began to exercise their functions, and the priest concentrated more on the ritual and ceremonial part of his work. No longer could sacrifice be offered by any man, or even by any priest. The right to sacrifice was limited to the house of Aaron, and so august did the supreme ceremony finally become that only one man, the high priest, was allowed to enter the holy place, and even he could do so only once a year.

As the significance of the priest's office changed, so did the thought of sacrifice. While the idea of sacrifice as an offering remained constant throughout,<sup>1</sup> it came to be linked with the thought of sin for which atonement was made in the offered sacrifice.<sup>2</sup>

Through prophet and priest, through the simple ceremonial that came mid-way between the cultus of early days and the elaborate ritual of the later temple, through the enactments of the early Torah and the traditional stories of their race, the Wise men received their cultural and religious heritage, which forms the background of the book of Proverbs.

---

1. "Whatever the historical evolution of the idea of sacrifice, or whatever its primary idea, it seems certain that this idea of a gift or offering to God is the prevailing idea in the Hebrew religion from the earliest."  
(The Theology of the Old Testament. A.B. Davidson. p.315.)

2. "The sacrificial system is left in the Old Testament without explanation as regards redemptive relations, except in a general way. Throughout the Scriptures, till we reach the final chapters of Isaiah, the animal sacrifices receive no explanation, and are not lifted up into any higher region."  
(Ibid., p.307.)

## (3)

The Background of the Analects.

Behind the Four Books which are specially connected either with Confucius or his disciples of later generations, stand the Five Books, traditionally held to be the most ancient works of Chinese literature. How far is one justified in turning to them for light on the question of Confucius' cultural and religious inheritance? Within recent years, there has been a marked change of critical opinion with regard to two of the Five Books - The Shu and the Shih. When in 1865 Legge discussed the question of the trustworthiness of the Shu Ching as a genuine narrative of the events which they professed to relate, he wrote, "It may be said at once, in reference to the greater number of them, that there is no reasonable ground on which to call them in question.... The more recent they are, the more of course are they to be relied on. The Books of Chow<sup>1</sup> were contemporaneous with the events which they describe, and became public property not long after their composition. Provision was made....by the statutes of Chow, for the preservation of the monuments of previous dynasties. But those monuments were at no time very numerous, and they could not but be injured, and were not unlikely to be corrupted in passing from one dynasty to another. From the time of T'ang, the Successful,

---

1. The dates of the dynasty were 1122 B.C. - 255 B.C.



however, commonly placed in the 18th century before Christ, we seem to be able to tread the field of history with a somewhat confident step."<sup>1</sup> Again, in his "Religions of China", Legge speaks of the Shu as "the oldest of Chinese books".<sup>2</sup> The Shih, according to Legge, is later. "The existing Book of Poetry is the fragment of various collections made during the early reigns of the kings of Chow, and added to at intervals."<sup>3</sup>

Later criticism has lost much of Legge's confidence in the genuineness of the Book of History, while it is inclined, on the other hand, to rate the Shih more highly than the Shu. According to a number of modern Chinese scholars, the latter is "only partially genuine".<sup>4</sup> Hu Shih, probably the greatest living Chinese scholar trained in methods of scientific research, refuses to quote anything from the Book of History, though he accepts in its entirety the Book of Poetry.<sup>5</sup> Other Chinese thinkers, however, affirm that his position is too radical, and maintain that in the Shu Ching twenty-eight books are genuine - the books of the 'modern literature'.<sup>6</sup> If modern criticism has dealt somewhat hardly with the Book of History, it has exalted the position of

- 
1. The Chinese Classics.Vol.3,Part 1. James Legge. p.48( Prolegomena )
  2. The Religions of China. " " p.23
  3. The Chinese Classics.Vol.4,Part 1. " " p.27( " )
  4. The Political Philosophy of Confucianism. Leonard S. Hsu.p.13.Int.
  5. The Development of the Logical Method in Ancient China.  
Hu Shih. p.1, Preface.
  6. The Political Philosophy of Confucianism. Leonard S. Hsu.  
p.14, Int. and pp.17,18.

the Book of Poetry. It, according to a recent Continental scholar, "belongs to the most reliable and best preserved works of Chinese literature."<sup>1</sup>

What light, then, does the Shih, and the generally accepted reliable sections of the Shu, throw on the basic thoughts on religion and life as held in the pre-Confucian world?<sup>2</sup>

The ancient Canons contain many references to 天 T'ien and 上帝 Shang Ti - the names used to describe the Deity. In the Shu Ching, 'T'ien' is used more than one hundred and fifty times, and 'Shang Ti' occurs about twenty times.<sup>3</sup> In the odes in the Shih Ching that illustrate the religious views and practices of the time there are a hundred and one references to Heaven 天,<sup>4</sup> and the word God 上帝 occurs forty times. The Ch'un Ch'iu is, on first appearance, little more than a bald summary of historical events,<sup>5</sup> but even there it is explicitly affirmed that the head of

- 
1. Confucius and Confucianism. Richard Wilhelm. p.113.
  2. Since the discussion on the genuineness of the Shu has not continued long enough for the last word to have been said, it would seem unwise to withhold relevant evidence from its pages, simply because in the opinion of some these pages are not genuine. Evidence, therefore, will be given from the disputed books - but in a footnote, and attention will be drawn to the doubtfulness of the source.
  3. Confucianism and Its Rivals. Herbert A. Giles. p.12.
  4. References to the 'Son of Heaven' are not included; neither are those occasions (e.g. Ode 6, Stanza 6, Hsiang Po, Minor Odes of the Kingdom) on which Heaven is inferred, but not expressly stated.
  5. But Wilhelm in his Confucius and Confucianism (p.130-132) shows that the laconic statements contain, in the exactitude of their phrasing, most trenchant criticisms of historical events.

the Chou state is God's appointed, or, to use the Western phrase, King by the grace of God. It is obvious that the ancient classical writings assume the existence of the Deity. What manner of Deity is He?

Two terms are used to describe Him - T'ien and Shang Ti. Round these expressions endless controversy has turned, as to the exact etymological significance of each character, and as to the priority of one or other term, and the end of the battle is not yet. On one point, however, all are agreed - that the two names refer to one and the selfsame God. There is, however, a certain difference of atmosphere and colour between the aspect of God that is generally stressed when the character for T'ien is used, and that which is presented when Shang Ti is mentioned. Giles puts it thus: 'T'ien may be regarded as God Passive, Shang Ti as God Active; T'ien as Jahveh, or Jehovah (in spite of Dr. Pusey's prohibition of these forms), Shang Ti as God. T'ien is perhaps more an abstract, Shang Ti a more personal Deity. Reference to T'ien is usually associated with fate or destiny, calamities, blessings, prayers for help, and so forth. The commandments of T'ien are hard to obey. He is compassionate, as well as to be feared, unjust, and cruel. Shang Ti is more definitely associated with a heaven for departed spirits, and He walks, as God did in the Garden of Eden, leaves tracks on the ground, enjoys, as we have seen, the sweet savour of sacrifices, approves or disapproves conduct, deals with rewards or punishments in a more intimate way, and comes more actually into touch with the

human race.<sup>1</sup> Legge is at one with Giles in suggesting that the difference between the two terms is comparable with that between Jahveh and Elohim, the former being not unlike T'ien and the latter Shang Ti. "T'ien" says Legge, "has had much of the force of the name Jahve, as explained by God Himself to Moses; Tî has presented that absolute deity in the relation of men to their lord and governor. Tî was to the Chinese fathers, I believe, exactly what God was to our fathers, whenever they took the great name on their lips."<sup>2</sup>

The partial equating of 'Shang Ti' and 'Elohim' is due to the monarchial element suggested in the two terms. Nevertheless, one cannot but feel that there is a certain risk in comparing terms which may correspond at one point and differ at another. If 上帝 and 天 are alike in hinting at the idea of supreme rule and government, they differ in some of the suggestions they make as to the way in which the Deity rules. Shang Ti has more frankly anthropomorphic associations than Elohim has. If the human way in which Ti is described is the main point taken into consideration, Shang Ti should rather be compared with Jahveh, and T'ien, the (relatively) abstract and aloof, with Elohim. It would be unwise, however, to lay too much stress on the difference between T'ien and Shang Ti, partly because it is clear that both terms refer to the same God, and partly because, on certain occasions at least, it

---

1. Confucianism and Its Rivals. Herbert A. Giles. pp.37,38.

2. The Religions of China. James Legge. p.10-11.

seems to be a matter of indifference which name is used. Thus in a certain poem reference is made to T'ien in connection with a certain thought, and a few lines further on, in the same poem, and in connection with the same thought, the name Shang Ti is used.<sup>1</sup>

What, then, are the broad characteristics of this God, who now under the term Shang Ti and now under that of T'ien, is mentioned so frequently in the Shu Ching and the Shih? In the latter, the more impersonal 'T'ien' is used more frequently than 'Shang Ti' - yet how human are the emotions of Heaven! Heaven is intelligent, angry, of changing mood.<sup>2</sup> So frankly do the Odes speak of the august Being who rules the world, that they are not afraid to call Heaven unjust, unkind, unpitying.<sup>3</sup> "Compassionate Heaven, arrayed in terrors How is it that you exercise no forethought no care?"<sup>4</sup> "The way of Heaven is hard and difficult."<sup>5</sup> "The ordinances of Heaven are inexplicable."<sup>6</sup> "The terrors of great Heaven are excessive, But indeed I have committed no crime."<sup>7</sup> In some of the Odes, however, a different note is struck; one of obedience and resignation to the heavenly will. Thus we have,

"Almighty God makes no mistakes",

and then a whole verse as follows:

- 
1. e.g. "The favour of God did not leave (Shang)..... So did he receive the blessing of Heaven." The Sacrificial Odes of Shang.  
The Khang Fa.
2. Shih. (Legge's trans.) Minor Odes of the Kingdom. 10.
3. " " " " " " " " 7.
4. " " " " " " " " 10.
5. " " " " " " " " Eighth Decade 5.
6. " " " " " " " " 9.
7. " " " " " " " " 4.

"Revere the anger of God,  
 And venture not to make light of it;  
 Revere the changing moods of God,  
 And venture not to pursue your own course.  
 Almighty God sees clearly,  
 And is with you in your outgoings.  
 Almighty God is discerning,  
 And is with you in all your wanderings." 1

What Heaven is can be known from what Heaven does. It is Heaven that appoints<sup>2</sup> and protects the king, that gives him detailed military advice,<sup>3</sup> and that accompanies him on the field of battle.<sup>4</sup> It is Heaven that befriends an Empress, and enables her to conceive;<sup>5</sup> it is Heaven that bestows a Prime Minister on the State;<sup>6</sup> it is Heaven that surveys<sup>7</sup> the hills, and that sends inflections and calamities on man;<sup>8</sup> it is Heaven that moves and shakes the individual.<sup>9</sup>

While, on occasion, the ancient writers speak with great frankness about the incomprehensible or unjust actions of Heaven, such words represent the momentary outburst of the poet rather than the deep settled thought of the philosopher. At the heart of the Shih Ching is the belief in the moral character of Heaven. Fundamental, too, is the idea that man's moral nature is derived from and dependent on the righteousness of Heaven. Calamity and

- 
- |    |                              |                            |              |
|----|------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------|
| 1. | Confucianism and Its Rivals. | Herbert A. Giles.          | pp. 42, 43.  |
| 2. | Shih. (Legge's trans.)       | Sacrificial Odes of Shang  | 3.           |
| 3. | "                            | Major Odes of the Kingdom. | 7. Decade 1. |
| 4. | "                            | Praise Ode of Lu.          | Ode 4.       |
| 5. | "                            | "                          | " 4.         |
| 6. | "                            | Sacrificial Ode of Shang.  | 4.           |
| 7. | "                            | Major Odes of the Kingdom. | 7.           |
| 8. | "                            | Minor Odes of the Kingdom. | 10.          |
| 9. | "                            | "                          | 8.           |

destruction are sure signs of the anger of Heaven directed on a  
 disobedient and wicked people.<sup>1</sup>

"I look up to great Heaven,  
 But it shows us no kindness.  
 Very long have we been disquieted,  
 And then great calamities are sent down (upon us).  
 There is nothing settled in the country;  
 Officers and people are in distress....  
 Why is it that Heaven is (thus) reproving (you)?  
 Why is it that Heaven is not blessing (you)?  
 You neglect your great barbarian (foes),  
 And regard me with hatred...  
 Your demeanour is all unseemly.  
 Good men are going away,  
 And the country is sure to go to ruin.  
 Heaven is letting down its net,  
 And many (are the calamities in it)." 2

The same line of ethical thought is pursued in the famous speech of T'ang as recorded in the Shu Ching. The reigning emperor at that time, 1766 B.C., was a man of notoriously evil life, and against him T'ang was moved to lead a revolt. But the people were unwilling to embark on such a hazardous enterprise, and in order to quicken their zeal, T'ang set forth his reasons for rebelling in the following clear and unambiguous words:-

"It is not I, the little child, who dare to undertake a rebellious enterprise; but for the many crimes of the sovereign of Hsia, Heaven has given the charge to destroy him... The sovereign of Hsia is guilty, and, as I fear God, I dare not but punish him.... Assist, I pray you, me, the One man, to carry out the punishment appointed by Heaven."<sup>3</sup> "The fear of God", says Giles, "seems to

1. Shih. (Legge's trans.) Major Odes of the Kingdom. 10. Decade 3.

2. " " " " " " " " " " "

3. Shu Ching. The Books of Shang. The Speech of T'ang. (This belongs to the 'new text' section of the Shu, which is regarded with greater confidence than the ancient literature section.)





From the Shih Ching and the Shu the evidence is clear not only that the ancient Chinese world believed in a personal God dwelling in the heavens above, a God who was a moral Being, but also that it was the desire and will of Heaven that morality should be the governing principle of earth. This was the cord that bound Heaven to earth. "It is not too much to say", says Krause, "that in China all religion so far as it is genuinely Chinese and free from foreign influence - is through and through moral. The religious sanction is always based on the moral relation by which all things are governed."<sup>1</sup>

Morality is a tenuous, intangible conception that may easily be lost sight of in the strain and stress of ordinary life. What hint is there in the Shih Ching and the Shu that provision was made in ancient times for the linking of the lives of average men with the moral power that governed the universe? In seeking to answer that question, one obtains some light on the subject from the use of the two different names for God - Shang Ti and T'ien. Study of the ancient documents makes it plain that 'Shang Ti,' or Supreme Sovereign, was the term specially used by the Emperor to describe the Divine Being with whom he had to do, while the more general and impersonal 'Tien' or Heaven was the name employed by the general populace. There is no question of there being two Gods, one worshipped by the Emperor and the other by his subjects. It is one and the same God who is designated. Just as a king is king to all,

---

1. F.E.A. Krause. Essay on Chinese Religion in 'Religions of the World' by Carl Clemen. p.84.

but king and father to his own son, so the God Who was approached by the more general title of Heaven by all, could be addressed by the more specific title of Supreme Sovereign by him who was His appointed ruler on earth. "In the invisible world" Shang Ti "is aided by a multitude of spirits, or divine beings; in the visible world by sages and rulers, of whom the chief was the Emperor of China, who, as pontifex maximus and vicar of God, has heretofore had sole right to sacrifice to Him as Shang Ti ..... Shang Ti..is verily the King of kings, inasmuch as throughout Chinese history none but kings have offered sacrifice to Him, for the offering of sacrifice by any one else is equivalent to rebellion, the sacrificer by such act asserting his claim to the imperial office of pontifex maximus, and therefore to the throne."<sup>1</sup>

To whom could the people offer sacrifice, since sacrifice to Shang Ti was forbidden. They could worship T'ien and pray to T'ien.<sup>2</sup> This permission, however, did not mean much,<sup>3</sup> since it was

---

1. The Three Religions of China. W.E.Soothill. pp.116, 122.

It is interesting to note that the first reference to God in the Shu Ching (though in the ancient and less generally accepted text the Canon of Shun), occurs in connection with sacrifice. The emperor "sacrificed specially, but with the ordinary forms, to God; sacrificed with reverent purity to the Six Honoured Ones; offered their appropriate sacrifices to the hills and rivers; and extended his worship to the host of spirits."

2. "Although the Ritual of the Chou dynasty endeavours to limit the religion of the common people to a worship of their ancestors, the worship of public or territorial divinities to territorial authorities, and the worship of Shang Ti solely to the Emperor, yet passages..show that the ear of 'Heaven', and even of Shang Ti, was open to the cry of the people.. God considered as Sovereign, could only be officially approached by His vice-regent.. Considered in the sense of Providence, T'ien..might be approached by all men." (Soothill. Ibid. p.;35.)

3. "Prayer..is not a prominent characteristic in the ancient books, nor..has it ever formed an enriching quality of Chinese worship. Of old and now its chief form has been an invocation for some special, and generally if not always, some merely temporal blessing." (Soothill. Ibid. p.138.)

sacrifice rather than prayer that occupied the central position in the thought and imagination of ancient China. Debarred from immediate access to the Supreme Governor, the people worshipped the spirits of their ancestors, and sacrificed to them.

The subject of ancestor worship raises all kinds of recondite questions which it is unnecessary to answer here - e.g. the origin of the ancestral cult, the position occupied by the spirits of the dead in the hierarchy of the unseen world, and the religious significance to the worshipper of the rites in which he took part. Suffice it only to say that ancestor worship "antedates our most ancient records, in which it has left abundant traces of an already vigorous existence".<sup>1</sup> The classical writings abound in references to the spirits of the ancestors, the ancestral temples, and the rites to be performed therein. One of the heavy charges laid in the *Shu Ching* against the last ruler of the Shang dynasty,<sup>2</sup> the tyrant Chou, or Shou, was that "he sits squatting on his heels, not serving God nor the spirits of heaven and earth, neglecting also the temple of his ancestors, and not sacrificing in it."<sup>3</sup> To the ancestral spirits announcements were made of important events about to take place in the life of the worshipper, and if guidance with regard to the wisdom or unwisdom of these was desired, it was under-

---

1. Chinese Religious Ideas. P.J. Maclagan. p. 161

2. The Shang dynasty came to an end in 1122 B.C., being succeeded by the Chou.

3. The Great Declaration. Bk.1, Sect.1. *Shu Ching*.

stood that the spirits would signify approval or disapproval.<sup>1</sup> On occasions of need, prayers and sacrifices with a specific intention were offered to the ancestral spirits. Thus, an ode runs, "The drought is excessive; its fervours become more and more tormenting. I have not ceased offering pure sacrifices; from the border altars<sup>2</sup> I have gone to the ancestral temple. To the (Powers)<sup>3</sup> above and below I have presented my offerings and then buried them - There is no spirit whom I have not honoured."<sup>4</sup> With the passing of time, the ancestral spirits seem to have been exalted to the position of tutelary spirits, whose influence was beneficent. "As certain passages in the Book of Poetry show, there was a certain quality of freedom and brightness about these patriarchal customs. The memory of the dead was a blessing; they were held in remembrance, and perhaps a tree under which they had sat was tended as a memorial for the future. (See Shi King. Shao Nan. 1.2,5.) Everything was

---

1. In the Counsels of the Great Yü (Shu Ching) (ancient text, and less reliable) the following passage occurs, "My mind (in this matter) was determined in the first place; I consulted and deliberated with all (my ministers and people), and they were of one accord with me. The spirits signified their assent, and the tortoise shell and divining stalks concurred."

2. "By 'the border altars' we are to understand the altars in the suburbs of the capital, where Heaven and Earth were sacrificed to; - the great services at the solstices, and any other seasons." Legge's footnote to above ode - Major Odes of the Kingdom. Decade 3, Ode 4.

3. "The (Powers) above and below" are Heaven and Earth.' Ibid.

4. Ode 4. Ibid.

derived from the principle that the dead should not be a burden to oppress the living. At the sacrificial feast given in their honour the dead were actually present - the ancestors were represented by the grandson, and shared in the family's rejoicing."<sup>1</sup>

Unlike the sacrifices offered to Shang Ti, which could be celebrated only by the Emperor, the ancestral cult was observed by all, although only male descendants were allowed to perform the rites. There was no special priestly caste, set aside to participate in the sacrificial ceremony. The head of the house, be he emperor or duke, farmer or craftsman, acted as his own priest, offering the sacrifices, in the name of the living, to the spirits of the ancestors.

Why such sacrifices? What was it that led the Emperor (alike when worshipping Shang Ti and the spirits of his ancestors), and the common people (alike when worshipping the spirits of field and wood, and the spirits of their forefathers) to sacrifice? The question is a difficult one to answer, and all that will be said here will be an indication of the various theories held regarding the sacrificial rites. Perhaps the simplest point of view, and the one most in harmony with the spirit of the ancient classical writings, is that given by implication by Legge when he speaks of "those great seasonal occasions at the court of China (which) have always been what we might call grand family reunions, where the dead and the living meet, eating and drinking together - where the living worship

---

1. A Short History of Chinese Civilization. Richard Wilhelm. p.111.

the dead, and the dead bless the living."<sup>1</sup> Thus the king says to his father, in an ancient ode,

"While I present (this) noble bull,  
And they assist me in setting forth the sacrifice,  
O great and august Father,  
Comfort me, your filial son."<sup>2</sup>

Since the spirits or the one great Spirit to whom the sacrifices were offered were regarded as <sup>more</sup> powerful than the worshippers, it was natural that the idea of propitiation, and of seeking to gain the good-will of the spirit, should be present.

"I have brought my offerings,  
A ram and a bull.  
May Heaven accept them.

I imitate and follow and observe the statutes  
of king Wan,  
Seeking daily to secure the tranquillity of the kingdom.  
King Wan, the Blessor, has descended on the right,  
and accepted (the offerings).

Do I not, night and day,  
Revere the majesty of Heaven,  
Thus to preserve (its favour)?<sup>3</sup>

Allied with this, was the idea of proffering a direct request to the departed spirit, in the hope and expectation that the gift desired would be granted. Of a certain famous woman of legendary times, an ode said, "She had presented a pure offering and sacrificed, That her childlessness might be taken away."<sup>4</sup> Another ode tells how a certain king prayed and sacrificed in order that the drought might come

1. The Religions of China. James Legge. p.81.

2. Shih Ching (Legge's trans.) Sacrificial Odes of Kau. Decade 2, Ode 7.

3. Shih Ching. Sacrificial Odes of Kau. Decade 1. Ode 7.

4. " " Major Odes of the Kingdom. " 2. " 1.

to an end.<sup>1</sup> In the above ode - "I have brought my offerings" - there is a suggestion of yet another meaning which ancestral sacrifices may have possessed. The worshipper, in the ode, hesitated to assume that God would accept his offerings, and accordingly used the services of King Wan as intermediary. Since Confucius himself confessed to ignorance of the meaning of the great sacrifice,<sup>2</sup> it is not surprising that those of a later day should find themselves unable to arrive at a clear understanding of the meaning of the sacrificial rites. It is interesting to note that the idea of sacrifice as expiatory finds little place in the ancient writings. Significant too is the early recognition of the fact that the spirit in which the worshippers presented their offering was more important than the value of the gift.<sup>3</sup>

With regard to the way in which the sacrifices were offered it seems to have been not altogether unlike the method adopted in ancient Israel. An ancient ode runs -

1. Shih Ching. Major Odes of the Kingdom. Decade 3. Ode 4.

(See pp.47,48 of thesis.)

This conception of sacrifice as linked with a prayer for definite blessing would not have been accepted by Confucius. "In the Li Chi, the Book of Rites, Confucius makes the important statement that 'with sacrifice there should not be prayer, for this would imply a desire for personal advantage.'" (The Three Religions of China.

W.E. Soothill. p.141.)

2. "When someone asked the meaning of the quinquennial sacrifice, the Master replied: 'I do not know.'" Analects. Bk.3. Ch.11.

3. "Heaven has no (partial) affection:- only to those who are reverent does it show affection.... The spirits do not always accept the sacrifices that are offered to them; - they accept only the sacrifices of the sincere." Shu Ching. Thai Kia. Sect.3 (This is from the ancient, and less generally accepted text.)

"How shall we arrange our sacrifices to Hou Chi?<sup>1</sup>  
 Some rub grain in the mortar, others scoop it out,  
 Some sift it, some tread it from the husk,  
 Some wash it - sou, sou. (suggesting noise)  
 Some steam it, fou, fou. (suggesting steam)  
 Now we divine, now we consider the ceremonial.  
 We burn fragrant southernwood together with the fat of  
                     the victim;  
 We take a ram, and offer it in sacrifice;  
 We offer roast flesh and broiled;  
 And thus welcome the New Year.  
 We pile the wooden sacrificial vessels with meat,  
 And fill the earthenware vessels with broth.  
 At length the fragrance mounts on high,  
 And God, well pleased, smells the sweet savour,  
 Sweet indeed, and in due season." 2

In endeavouring to sum up the religious beliefs of ancient China, one finds of service an analogy drawn from the political life of the state. At the head of the people stood the Emperor, with whom, doubtless, in theory, any member of the community could, in an emergency, have contact. But the divinity that hedges a king placed a barrier of intermediaries, of lessening power and rank, between the august presence and the humble denizens of the empire. To the latter, the authority immediately above them would have more practical significance than had the distant and exalted monarch.

So it was in the religious sphere. While it is clear from the classical writings that the people could pray to T'ien, the belief was denuded of much of its value by two factors - first, the exclusive connection that was declared to subsist between the Supreme Ruler in heaven and the supreme ruler on earth, and,

---

1. The mythical and deified progenitor of the Chinese.

2. Quoted in Confucianism and Its Rivals. Herbert A. Giles.  
 pp.35,36.



second, the extension to the religious sphere of political ideas of kingship, and the correct attitude to be observed by the subjects of the king. Factors such as these would naturally tend to turn the religious instincts of the people to find satisfaction in the worship of their ancestors or the spirits of earth and sky. Moreover, whatever be the spirit to which sacrifices were offered, the being worshipped would occupy for the worshipper, at the moment of prayer, the whole sphere of the divine, and therefore would be to him as god.<sup>1</sup> Thus, belief in one supreme God could exist with the practical recognition and worship of lesser gods, who, in effect, ousted the Supreme from the position He theoretically was believed to hold. The lesser gods overcame the stronger. The unifying tendency of thought which belief in one God induced had to fight against the widespread, practical belief in a vast galaxy of gods - a pantheon to whose size there was no limit. "There can be little doubt that the number of (the spirits or gods) tended to increase from early times down to the period of Confucius, indeed, not only until his days, but ever since."<sup>2</sup> The hosts of the spirits, moreover, not only increased in number, but changed in quality as well. The beneficent spirits of earlier days came to be accompanied by spirits of a sinister kind. The 'daimon' became the 'demon'. The darker aspects tended to loom larger

---

1. In Chinese Religious Ideas, on p.174, P.J. MacLagan, adopting a suggestion of Sir Henry Jones, touches on this idea.

2. The Three Religions of China. W.E. Soothill. p.129.

than the light.<sup>1</sup>

So many-sided was the complex of religious ideas current in ancient China, that it is little wonder that it has given rise to a rich variety of interpretations. On the one hand, there are those who are so impressed with the reality and purity of the classical belief in Shang Ti, that they can describe the religion of that day as monotheism, or even pure monotheism. On the other hand, a scholar like De Groot sees in that religion such overwhelming evidence of belief in spirits and demons that he designates it animism.<sup>2</sup> Between these points of view is the position of Legge, who is emphatically of the opinion that "this inferior worship was not a nature-worship, and that it was subordinate to the homage due to God."<sup>3</sup> The variety of views is interesting as

1. Wilhelm's words are interesting - "Just as in Greece superstitions in the form of gloomy underground customs were maintained among the people side by side with the serene, sunny philosophy of the Homeric heroes, so here too the overshadowing fear of the putrefying body, of the ghosts of long ago, continued to be nursed along side the patriarchal customs which regarded the dead as spirits of light conferring blessings and good fortune on their descendants." (A Short History of Chinese Civilization. p.111)

2. De Groot maintains that "the primeval form of the religion of the Chinese, and its very core to this day, is Animism. In China it is based on an implicit belief in the animation of the universe, and of every being or thing which exists in it...The main base of the Chinese system of religion is a Universalistic Animism. The universe being in all its parts crowded with shen and kuei, the system is, moreover, thoroughly Polytheistic and Polydemonistic."

3. The Religions of China. James Legge. p.26.

showing the utterly different views to which historical research can lead scholars. Probably the diversity of opinion is due in part to the paucity of data, and the insufficiency of critical work that has as yet been done on the ancient texts. We shall be on firmer ground when Oriental and Occidental students together come to agreed findings regarding the dates of the respective sections of the Five Books. Until that day comes, there is not very much hope of being able to say with confidence whether animism was a declension from a purer and more ancient monotheism, or whether monotheism grew out of animism. But one thing is certain, that in ancient times men believed alike in Shang Ti or T'ien, in the spirits of their ancestors, and in the spirits of field and river and wood. Of these three beliefs the classical writings speak much more of the first and second than of the third. Perhaps Maclagan comes as near as any to a just and true conception of the religious world as Confucius received it from those who had gone before. "To call it polytheism is doing more than justice to the spirits of hills and rivers which still 'fall within the natural system of things'. To call it spiritism is unfair to the conception of Shang-ti with its large measure of ethical freedom. It is as if emerging from a mass of lower spiritist ideas the one conception of Shang-ti had risen to the level of polytheistic religions, and because of its uniqueness might still trend upwards. We cannot agree with Professor Giles that we have here a monotheism which he even calls a 'pure monotheism', a term which surely

excludes the acknowledgment of other gods; but, in the recognition of such a being as Shangti or Thien as the Supreme Being, we have at least a monarchianism of a very high ethical type. Such, then, was Confucius' religious heritage."<sup>1</sup>

---

1. Chinese Religious Ideas. P.F. Maclagan. p.31. J/

(4)

# A Comparison of the Respective Religious

## Backgrounds of the Book of Proverbs and the Analects of Confucius.

How do ancient Hebrew and Chinese thought compare with one another? In what respects is there affinity between them, and where do they differ? Fundamentally, there is a certain resemblance in their integration of religion and life, and their tacit refusal to distinguish between the 'sacred' and the 'secular'. What Krause says of Chinese religious thought could almost be taken to apply to the outlook of the ancient Hebrew world: "Among the Chinese, religion occupies a position essentially different from that which it fills in the case of other great civilized peoples. It has neither been content to control only one side of the activities of life nor claimed a place of its own apart from everything else.<sup>1</sup> It was fitted into the civilization as a whole, and was at all points bound up with the general view of the world held by the ancient Chinese."<sup>2</sup>

---

1. These last eleven words could not be said to be true of the whole vista of Hebrew thought. Sometimes the psalmist, in the exaltation of his devotion, speaks as though nothing mattered but God, (e.g. 73, 25), and sometimes the priest, working from a different end, tended to bring all life within narrow legalistic limits - but these apply to a later than the pre-700 B.C. period.

2. Essay on Chinese Religion. F.E.A.Krause. p.78.

Yet amid this similarity of outlook, points of difference can be clearly discerned. While both peoples are alike in refusing to divide into water-tight compartments their religion and their daily life, the respective emphasis on what one might call the seen and the unseen differs. In the Hebrew Scriptures God occupies the central position, which in the Chinese classics is held by man. The subject of the Old Testament is God, who shows Himself at work on the stage of the world; the subject of the Shih Ching and the Shu is a man, who reveals his true nature according as he aligns himself with the purposes of Heaven. The pre-Confucian writings throw much light on the history of ancient China - a history that shows clear signs of the influence of God. The sacred texts of the Jews, on the other hand, show God at work in history.

Although the Supreme Power that governs the universe is regarded from different points of view by the Israel and the China of old time, it is conceivable that the God of Whom Hebrew prophet and Chinese poet alike speak should be regarded as possessing the selfsame characteristics. Does He? Here again, there are both points of resemblance and difference.

The vivid anthropomorphism of the J document finds its counterpart in various passages in the Shih Ching, but on the whole, the anthropomorphic line of thought of the Chinese classics is less marked than that of the Hebrew Scriptures.<sup>1</sup> So, too, is the

---

1. "So far as the Shu King is concerned, (Shang-ti) is not conceived as anthropomorphic." P.J. MacLagan. Chinese Religious Ideas. p.23.

idea of the personal intervention of God less stressed. The Chinese mind is averse to the thought of a God Who acts in strange, mysterious, unaccountable ways; it is also chary of the idea that God speaks directly to His children.<sup>1</sup> Neither the Shih Ching nor the Shu deny the possibility of the direct disclosure of the will of God to man. In the speech of the founder of the Chao dynasty, King Wu says, "Great Heaven was moved with indignation, and charged my deceased father Wān to display its terrors... The iniquity of Shang is full. Heaven gives command to destroy it. If I did not obey Heaven, my iniquity would be as great."<sup>2</sup> A poem in the Shih says quite clearly that God makes His will known to man. "God said to king Wān, "Be not like those who reject this and cling to that; Be not like those who are ruled by their likings and desires." "<sup>3</sup> Such a thought, however, appears seldom - in sharp contrast to the Old Testament with its simple acceptance of the fact that God comes into personal, living contact with men and women. The Chinese mind is at one with the Hebrew in believing that the will of God can be known, but the former considers that the Divine will is revealed indirectly rather than directly, through divination or the phenomenon of Nature, rather than through the stirring of a man's being by

1. In a footnote to (3), Legge says, "The statement that 'God spake to King Wān', repeated in stanza 7, vexes the Chinese critics, and they find in it simply an intimation that Wān's conduct was 'in accordance with the will of Heaven.'"

2. Shu Ching. The Great Declaration. Sect.1. (Legge's Trans.)

3. Shih " " . Major Odes of the Kingdom, Dec.1. " " " Ode 7. "It is plain that the writer, in giving such a form to his meaning must have conceived of God as a personal Being, knowing men's hearts, and able to influence them." Legge. Footnote.

God Himself. The Chinese see in drought and flood sure signs of the anger of Heaven, while beneficent Nature speaks to them of the favour of God. "O thou bright and great Heaven", runs an ode composed in a time of dire distress, "Shouldest thou not have compassion on us?..... Disorder grows, and no peace can be secured. Every state is being ruined;..... The doom of the kingdom hurries on..... I was born at an unhappy time, To meet with the severe anger of Heaven. Heaven is sending down death and disorder, And has put an end to our King. It is (now) sending down those devourers of the grain, So that the husbandry is all in evil case."<sup>1</sup>

If Hebrew and Chinese thought differed somewhat in their conception of the way in which God revealed Himself to man, both were at one in holding that there was a close connection between the Supreme Power that governed the universe and the moral life of man. An interesting difference, however, shows itself in the respective ways in which they arrived at their conception of what constituted morality. In the Shih Ching and the Shu the idea of right and wrong is more or less constant throughout, and undergoes little change. The Hebrew point of view, on the other hand, shows marked signs of change and development. Its method of discovery is evolutionary and experimental. At the outset, the connection between religion and ethics is but dimly understood.<sup>2</sup> A long

- 
1. Shih Ching. (Legge's trans.) Major Odes of the Kingdom. Dec. 3 Ode 3.
  2. Gesterley and Robinson go to the length of saying that until about the year 760 "religion had little or no moral content. Provided men paid their dues, offered their sacrifices, and observed their taboos, Yahweh would not interfere with their treatment one of another." Hebrew religion, Its Origin and Development. p. 191. As has been shown on pp. 28-29 of the thesis, the ethical significance of religion was felt germinally before that date - but the seed was still small.



process of education has to be gone through before the full meaning of righteousness and its integral connection with the All-Righteous are grasped by Hebrew prophet and saint.

Since this was the method whereby the ethical beliefs of the Old Testament were built up, its teaching on morality is very concrete. It is generally linked with specific cases of right and wrong doing, and it expresses itself more readily in the interpretation or appraisal of definite situations than in the adumbration of general principles. At one stage, the moral sense of the God-inspired leaders of the people expressed itself in a series of detailed moral maxims, believed to have been laid down by God Himself.<sup>1</sup> Later, the prophet Micah subsumed a multiplicity of rules under one all-embracing rubric - "What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"<sup>2</sup> In both, however, there is a certain kinship of spirit; in both, man is summoned by God to the practical task of living. When Amos, Hosea and their successors demonstrate the unity that lies behind the moral life by pointing to its source in the heart of God, their teaching has the colour, the rich concreteness, the living, personal element which accompanied the Hebrew consciousness of the reality of their God. The Old Testament is more concerned to speak of Him Who inspires and commands men to moral action, and of the ways in which man gives heed to or disobeys the All-Righteous One, than it

- 
1. e.g. The Ten Words of the Covenant (Ex.34, 17-26) and The Book of The Covenant (Ex.20, 23-26; 22, 18-31; 23, 1-19, and perhaps 21, 12-17).
  2. Micah 6, 8.

is to discuss such theoretical questions as the origin of man's moral being, or the inherent goodness or evil of his nature.

There is a subtle and interesting difference in the Chinese treatment of the subject. It is based on the premiss that Heaven is moral, and that man, by the will and intention and gift of Heaven, is moral too.<sup>1</sup> The laws of man's nature are given by Heaven.<sup>2</sup> "Heaven enlightens the people".<sup>3</sup> Heaven and earth are, as it were, two mirrors. in whose clear depths a common righteousness is clearly reflected. "Heaven hears and sees as our people hear and see; Heaven brightly approves and displays its terrors as our people brightly approve and would awe; - such connexion is there between the upper and lower (worlds)."<sup>4</sup> The same idea, according to the commentator,<sup>5</sup> is

1. Shih Ching. Minor Odes of the Kingdom. Dec.5, Ode 2 says, "What Heaven confers, (when once lost), is not regained". According to Legge's footnote. "'What Heaven confers' is, probably, the good human nature which by vice, and especially by drunkenness, may be irretrievably ruined".
2. "If we who are charged with government do not treat parties who proceed to such wickedness as offenders, the laws (of our nature) given by Heaven to our people will be thrown into great disorder and destroyed". Shu. Announcement to the Prince of Khang. ('New Text').
3. Shih Ching. Major Odes of the Kingdom. Dec.2, Ode 10. According to Legge's footnote. "The meaning is, that Heaven has so attuned the mind to virtue, that, if good example were set before the people, they would certainly .... follow it".
4. Shu Ching. Counsels of Káo Yáo. ('New Text' i. . the more generally accepted.)
5. Says Yen Zhan in words, which when translated into English convey a clear enough meaning, tho' the style of the translation leaves much to be desired - The opening words of the ode contain a general sentiment, expressing the principle that governs the relation between.... Heaven and men. According to line 1, ('the illustrious (virtue) is required below') the good or evil of a ruler cannot be concealed; according to 2 ('and the dread majesty is on high') Heaven, in giving its favour or taking it away, acts with strict decision. When below there is the illustrious illustration (of virtue), that reaches up on high. When above there is the awful majesty, that exercises a survey below. The relation between Heaven and men ought to excite our awe".

conveyed in the somewhat ambiguous words of the Tâ Hing - "The illustration of illustrious (virtue) is required below, And the dread majesty is on high".<sup>1</sup> Krause sums up the matter well when he says, "The basic fact from which Chinese thought starts is the reciprocity that exists between the cosmos and human life. Man has to frame his life after the pattern of nature, But heaven also is affected by human actions. Human life has cosmic relations, and these give to every event a moral meaning".<sup>2</sup> In comparison with the Hebrew point of view, the Chinese has a cosmic background, a philosophical undercurrent, which are much more marked than in the case of the former.<sup>3</sup> But Chinese thought, as a rule, sooner or later, takes a practical turn, and metaphysics merge into morals. So it is in this case. The unity of spirit that links together Heaven and earth must be expressed in action. Heaven's part it is to inspect and judge, to punish and reward. "In its inspection of men, below, Heaven's first consideration is of their righteousness, and it bestows on them (accordingly) length of years or the contrary".<sup>4</sup> As Heaven exercises its function, man's life is influenced, according as it receives the favour or the condemnation of Heaven. In the dual relationship, man has also a part to

- 
1. Shih. Major Odes of the Kingdom. Dec. 1. Ode 2.
  2. Religions of the World. Essay on Chinese Religion. F.E.A. Krause. p.78
  3. "No race that has profoundly influenced human culture has shown less interest in metaphysics than the ancient Jew. In the whole of the Bible there is only one passage which clearly shows a definitely philosophic interest, the prologue of the fourth Gospel; and this was written in Ephesus, the birthplace of Greek philosophy." The Buddha and the Christ. B.H. Streeter. p.48.
  4. Shu Ching. The Day of the Sacrifice to Kâo Zung. ('New Text').

play. In the exercise of virtue, he actually 'moves Heaven'.<sup>1</sup>  
 The fragrance of a man's goodness ascends to Heaven, and is approved  
 by Heaven.<sup>2</sup>

While the Chinese philosophise more on the subject than do the Hebrew writers, they do not make nearly so clear what is the content of morality. Sometimes in the Shih Ching and the Shu, incidental references are made to specific cases of wrong-doing. (Despite the axiom from which they start, that man's nature is moral, Chinese thinkers are clear-sighted enough to recognise that man often fails to reflect the righteousness of Heaven.) Reference is made to officials who neither reverence God nor one another,<sup>3</sup> to evil kings who neglect the ritual acts of worship, and allow robbers to ravage the countryside,<sup>4</sup> and to robbers and oppressors who go against the clear will of Heaven.<sup>5</sup> In the Great Plan a few remarks are made as to what constitutes praiseworthy conduct on the part of sovereign, officials and people,<sup>6</sup> and in the book 'Against

1. "It is virtue that moves Heaven. there is no distance to which it does not reach." Shu Ching. Counsels of the Great Yu. (Old and disputed text.)
2. "You will indeed be ministers doing right service to your king, and Heaven..will approve your great virtue." Shu Ching. Announcement about Drunkenness. ('New Text') So also the words in the Announcement to the Prince of Khang ('New Text') - "The fame of him ascended up to high God, and God approved."
3. Shih Ching. Minor Odes of the Kingdom. Dec.4, Ode 10.
4. Shu " Great Declaration. Sect.1. ('New Text').
5. Shih " Major Odes of the Kingdom. Dec.2, Ode 9.
6. Shu " ('New Text'.)

Luxurious Ease', a very practical hint is given to the pleasure-lover as to how to comport himself.<sup>1</sup> For the most part, however, such remarks are few and far between, and one understands the feelings of the young king who bemoaned his inability to understand the decrees of Heaven - "I cannot display wisdom and lead the people to prosperity; and how much less should I be able to reach the knowledge of the decree of Heaven".<sup>2</sup> If the king felt his unfitness to understand the will of the Supreme Ruler his people were in still worse case, since more attention is placed in the Shih and the Shu on the duties of kings and officials than on the obligations laid on ordinary men.

On this question of morality, it was as if the Chinese were so certain of the principle from which they started, that they left its application to take care of itself. The Hebrews, on the other hand, paid attention simultaneously to the application and the principle, the principle to them being no theoretical concept of reason nor philosophical axiom, but a living belief in a personal and holy God.

Both Hebrew and Chinese thinkers at one stage in the development of their religious thought, grasped the fact that the

1. "Imitate Wān's avoiding of excess in his sight-seeing, his indulgence in ease, his excursions, his hunting...Do not allow yourself the leisure to say, 'To-day I will indulge in pleasure.'" 'New Text.'

2. Shu Ching. The Great Announcement. ('New Text.')

power behind the universe was moral. Then man acted in flagrant opposition to the decrees of the Supreme Ruler, what then? The answer given by both peoples to this problem was, at one time, clear and decided - the wrong-doer was punished by the anger of Heaven, while the righteous man rejoiced in the favour of the Almighty. Further experience, however, of the complex life of human kind, brought the fact home alike to the Hebrew and the Chinese mind, that on occasion the bad man was not punished and the good man received no reward. In the face of this perplexing fact, one or other of two courses had to be taken. Either the original premiss, that God was just, had to be abandoned, or the whole syllogism be recast, with its logical sequence of punishment following on guilt. In Old Testament Scripture there is no more interesting study than to trace the ebb and flow of its thought as it grapples with this problem. Occasionally the first alternative is adopted - for a short space - as in the book of Job, where the dramatist puts into the lips of Job the assertion that God is unjust -

"For he breaketh me with a tempest,  
 And multiplieth my wounds without cause.  
 He will not suffer me to take my breath,  
 And filleth me with bitterness....  
 Though I be righteous, mine own mouth shall condemn me:  
 Though I be perfect, it (margin, he) shall prove me perverse.  
 It is all one; therefore I say,  
 He destroyeth the perfect and the wicked."  
 (9, v.17, 18, 20, 22.)

For the most part, however, prophet<sup>1</sup> and psalmist,<sup>2</sup> wise

1. e.g. Isaiah 53, "To whom hat the arm of the Lord been revealed?... He was despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief..It pleased the Lord to bruise him..He bare the sin of many."

2. e.g. Psalm 119, 75. "I know, O Lord, that thy judgements are right: and that thou of very faithfulness hast caused me to be troubled."  
 (Prayer Book version.)

<sup>1</sup>man and <sup>2</sup>dramatist attempt the second alternative, and set themselves to frame a new hypothesis, which will do justice both to the righteousness of God and the facts of life.<sup>3</sup>

When grappling with the problem, Chinese thought as represented in the Book of Odes, tended in the direction of the first alternative, of denying, or at least sharply doubting, the original proposition that God was just. This point is brought out by Liang Chi Chao, when he says, "A careful perusal of the Book of Odes, reading according to the time of composition, indicates very clearly the conception of Divine Rule. In the Shan and Chow dynasties, humility and reverence to God was extreme. The chapters of Shang Shu on these periods read exactly like Deuteronomy in the Old Testament. Towards the end of the Chow dynasty, the poets began to show a sceptical attitude towards God. Sayings such as 'God is merciless', 'The Almighty God is not perfect in virtue', 'The great God is unjust', fill the pages of this time. The original faith in God was greatly shaken. In a disturbed society

1. e.g. Prov.3,11-12. "My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord; neither be weary of his reproof. For whom the Lord loveth, he reproveth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth." The idea is worked out more fully in Ecclesiasticus. (This brings us down much later than the period with which the thesis deals, but its inherent interest is so great that it is worth quoting.) "My son, if thou comest to serve the Lord, prepare thy soul for trials. Set thy heart aright, and constantly endure, and make not haste in time of calamity.... Accept whatsoever is brought upon thee, and be long-suffering when thou passest into humiliation. For gold is tried in the fire, and acceptable men in the furnace of affliction." Ecc.2; 1,2,4 and 5.
2. "Who is this that hideth counsel without knowledge? Therefore have I uttered that which I understood not... Therefore I abhor myself and repent, in dust and ashes." Job 42; 3ab, and 6.
3. See also pp. 24-26 of thesis.

the facts of life insist that happiness is not due to good or disaster to evil.. When reason fails, doubt begins. Therefore according to the references in Tso Chuan, the thinkers of Chun Chiu no longer regard God with awe and reverence."<sup>1</sup>

In their theology, there are certain ideas about God which the ancient Jews and the forerunners of Confucius held in common. At one point, however, there is a curious difference. The idea that Jahveh was pre-eminently the God of Israel does not seem to have had its counterpart in the belief that Shang Ti or T'ien was exclusively the God of the Chinese. "Shang Ti is spoken of as exercising His moral sway over the Miao, a race or tribe alien from the speaker." Legge is emphatic that the ancient Chinese were monotheists, and not henotheists. It is possible that geography had a fair amount to do with this difference in theology. A small country like Palestine, surrounded by peoples of other lands and faiths, would naturally be more self-conscious in its religious thinking than would a large country like China.

1. Chinese Political Thought. Liang Chi Chao. p. 48.

But the sceptical point of view of which Liang Chi Chao speaks was by no means accepted by all. It was not adopted - as will be shown later - by Confucius.

Since a quotation from late Ecclesiasticus has been given, one will also be made from Mencius, even though he is posterior to Confucius. The resemblance to the point of view of Ecclesiasticus is very striking (see previous page). "When Heaven is about to confer a great office on anyone, it first exercises his mind with suffering and his sinews and bones with toil; it exposes his body to hunger and subjects him to extreme poverty; and it confounds his undertakings. In all these ways it stimulates his mind, hardens his nature, and supplies his incompetencies."



Be the reason what it may, the fact remains that in the ancient literature of China there is an undercurrent of universalism, and the belief that God is no mere tribal or even national God, but a God Whose writ runs every where.

The conception of God as held by the ancient Hebrews passed, as has been shown,<sup>1</sup> through many stages. The changes were, on the whole, emphatically to the good, yet there was one somewhat unfortunate, though doubtless inevitable, development. As the simple anthropomorphism of early thought passed away, and as increasing emphasis was placed on the majesty and holiness of God, the All-Righteous One tended to appear farther and farther removed from man's sight.<sup>2</sup> The God of Genesis Who walked and talked with men was succeeded (for some, at least) by a God Whose throne was in the heaven of heavens, between Whom and man there stood a host of angels and archangels, and Whose word was made known to man, no longer directly by God Himself, but through the mediation of Divine Wisdom, or the pronouncements of the Torah,<sup>3</sup> or the absolving voice of the High Priest. This tendency, however, was counteracted by several factors - one, the widespread knowledge of the simple, vivid stories of the early days of the

1. pp.19-30 of the thesis.

2. Says Streeter, "Love towards God...is impossible to anyone who conceives Reality as an impersonal Absolute. Indeed, I have often wondered how it was possible towards even a personal Being as august and exalted as the God of later Jewish monotheism. Yet beyond doubt some of the Psalmists did attain it." (The Buddha and the Christ. p.165.)

3. This brings us down later than 700 B.C., but its influence is apparent at least in certain sections of the introduction of Proverbs - ch.1-9.

Hebrew race - stories that were saturated with the conviction that God was the Divine Friend of man - and, two, the later realization that God was not only the God of great figures of the past, such as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and not only the God of Israel, but was also the God of each individual soul. "Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine."<sup>1</sup>

In the Shih Ching and the Shu, a somewhat similar tendency of thought is apparent, but in the Chinese case it is not held in check by healthy, counterbalancing factors. In the classics Shang Ti was shown as entering into close relations with His vice-regent on earth, the Emperor, and as manifesting to all in a general way His favour or His condemnation. When His power was exercised in ways that seemed to run counter to the canons of justice, the voice of the critic was heard<sup>2</sup> - and his defiant words would not conduce to bring God nearer to man, or man to God. Neither would the limiting of the worship of Shang Ti to the Emperor help to draw the thoughts of the average man to the Over-Ruler in Heaven. As a result, in the Book of Odes and the Book of History, lofty and noble as is their view of God, there are already faint signs that the belief in Shang Ti is not a sturdy

---

1. Ezekiel 18,4. In its context, the reference is entirely to the fact of the moral responsibility of each individual, but the discovery of ~~xxx~~ individual responsibility is but the other side of the truth of the individual's worth and value.

2. See p.67 of the thesis.

enough plant to weather the storms of life. Shang Ti does not adequately satisfy men's hearts. "At the beginning of the Chow dynasty", says Maclagan, "Heaven and Earth are recognised as the parents of all things, a style of speaking which, as Legge says, is quite new and places Heaven and Earth in the place of Heaven simply or of God (Shang-ti) ... A little later, in the time of the same Chow dynasty, there occurs a reference, the only one of its kind in the Shu King, to Yin and Yang... In the Shi King there is a development somewhat parallel. There is on the whole a lessening of the personal note in references to Shang-ti, and all the cases of what we may call confusion of the Supreme Being with the visible vault of heaven occur in the later rather than in the earlier odes, none of them in any ode earlier than 877 B.C."<sup>1</sup>

If this tendency was apparent in the books that were read by the learned, it was much more apparent, as has been shown,<sup>2</sup> in the religious thinking and habits of the people, which thinking was in later days to grow into the luxurious undergrowth of Taoist magic, and the abstruse minutiae of 'feng-shui'. Here again there was a sharp divergence between Hebrew and Chinese religious development. In an earlier section<sup>3</sup> it has been pointed out how the Old Testament contains many traces of the vestigial remains of earlier and primitive beliefs. With the passing of

---

1. Chinese Religious Ideas. pp.26, 27.

2. Pp. 51,53 of the thesis.

3. Pp. 32,33 " " " .

time, and the growth of truer conceptions of God and man, these outworn elements of earlier faiths faded away and died. It was otherwise in China. The cleaned and garnished room of man's heart, empty of any altar to Shang Ti, came to be filled with altars to other gods, to the spirits of ancestors and to those of field and river and wood. Instead of lesser beliefs making way for nobler truths, the process is rather one of deterioration and of unfortunate development. Of that unhappy set-back, however, there is not a trace in the thinking of the man who concentrated only on what was fair and worthy in the classical works of antiquity - Confucius.

---

## CHAPTER 3

### THE BOOK OF PROVERBS.

---

## CHAPTER 3.

## THE BOOK OF PROVERBS.

(1)

Introduction.

The book of Proverbs begins with the words אִנִּי וְאִנִּי בְּלִיָּה אִנִּי וְאִנִּי בְּלִיָּה "The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel". It is generally accepted by scholars, however, that the book as a whole does not go back to the time of Solomon, although there may be proverbs in it, some scholars hold, which go back to his time.<sup>1</sup> If Solomon be ruled out as the author of the

L. Delitzsch. "Between Solomon and Hezekiah, and probably under Jehoshaphat, the older Book of Proverbs contained in 1-24, 22 first appeared." The Book of Proverbs. p. 30. Vol. 1.

Cheyne. "The judgment of Hitzig (in such matters a conservative critic) must be maintained that the survival of Solomonic proverbs is no more than a possibility." Job and Solomon. p.165.

Oesterley. "Most modern critics reject entirely the tradition that Solomon composed a number of proverbs.... There must have been some reason for connecting wisdom with Solomon in this way; it cannot, so to say, have been grasped out of the air! ... The fact still remains that, like some other oriental monarchs both previous and subsequent to his day, he was a patron of such literature. This tradition, therefore, points to the fact that collections of proverbs existed as early as the time of Solomon; and though it is not suggested that the earliest collections incorporated in Proverbs belongs to this early date, it is not too great an assumption to say that they contain elements which in their origin go back to the time of Solomon. This will apply to the collections 10-22, 16 and 25-29, but more especially to 10-15. (The Book of Proverbs. p.21-22 Intro.)

Currie Martin. "It is difficult to tell whether much stress is to be laid upon his traditional connection with the proverbial literature...It is quite conceivable that Solomon had been the first to gather round him a school of sages, and may even have encouraged them to produce definite systems of teaching.  
Cent. Bible. pp. 10, 11

book as a whole, who wrote it? Even a superficial study of Proverbs makes it clear that the book is of composite workmanship, the product of different hands and times. It is a compilation of about eight or ten lesser works -

(1)	1-9	
(2)	10.v.1-22.v.16	
(3)	22.v.17 - 23.v.14	
(4)	23.v.15 - 24.v.22	
(5)	24.v.23 - 24	
(6)	25 - 29	
(7)	30.v.1-14.	
(8)	30.v.15-33.	
(9)	31.v.1-9	
(10)	31.v.10-31	1.

Most scholars are agreed on the general lines of some such division, and are at one in holding that <sup>of</sup> these sections, the first and the last three were added latest. Beyond that general consensus of thought, opinions differ widely. Broadly, the commentators form two schools, the one standing for an earlier date for the compilation of the central sections, and the other for a later period. To the former group belong Delitzsch, Cheyne (who thinks that some of the proverbs may be as old as the ninth century B.C.)<sup>2</sup>, Driver (who finds the compilation to extend from the golden days of the monarchy to the post-exilic times), Sellin (who affirms that one is justified in giving credence to the tradition that the nucleus of 10-22 goes back to the Solomonic era, 25-29 to Hezekiah's reign, and that 22.v.17 - 24.v.34 is also probably pre-exilic), Oesterley

---

1. Oesterley's division. Some commentators would put ch.22-24 together as one section, thus making eight divisions in all.

2. Cheyne puts ch.30 and 31 as possibly later than the return of the Jews from Babylon.

(who places 10 - 22, v.16 and 25-29 not later than 700 B.C., while 1-9 he would attribute in the main to the third century B.C.)<sup>1</sup>

The second group of scholars is at one with the above-mentioned in attributing to a late period the first and last sections of the book, but they differ in their view that the central chapters also are far removed from Solomon's time. To this school of thought belong Toy (who places the compilation of the book between 350 and 100), Gordon (who suggests the fourth and third centuries), Elmslie (who says, 'in their present form these proverbs belong to the period 350-200 B.C.')<sup>2</sup>, Hooke who holds that the general point of view suits the Persian period better than an earlier period, and suggests a date between 400 and 300,<sup>3,4</sup> and Cornill. Since our primary concern is not a critical discussion of the text of Proverbs, but rather a survey of the subject-matter of the book, the point at issue between the two schools of thought is not a vital one. The wisest course to follow would seem to be the adoption of a middle course, and to regard the book as belonging mainly to pre-exilic times. This is the position more generally held by

- 
1. To this group also belongs Kent, though he prefers a later date than the above. He suggests the Babylonian period. He says that 'practically all the English and American scholars' and Dillman, Ewald, Strack and Delitzsch accept the view that the book antedates the capture of Jerusalem. (The Wise Men of Ancient Israel, p.62.)
  2. Studies in Life from Jewish Proverbs. p. 38.
  3. Peake's Commentary. p. 397
  4. Kent cites the names of Vatke, Sellhausen, Stade, and Smend as exponents of the view that the different collections in their present form could not have appeared until long after the Exile. p. 62.



British scholars. If, following Oesterley, the two main collections are regarded as not later than 700 B.C., they would antedate the Analects by some two hundred and fifty or three hundred years.<sup>1</sup>

Since modern scholarship has ruled out the Solomonic authorship of the book as a whole, the question remains as to who is responsible for the collection. A hint is given in chapter 22, v.17, "Incline thine ear, and hear the words of the wise".<sup>2</sup> Who are they, these wise men to whom people are to give ear? The term occurs not infrequently in Scripture. Sometimes it bears the usual significance, and refers simply to those who are endowed with wisdom (Ecc. 6,8; Prov. 1,5; 16,21; 16,23). Sometimes, however, it seems to bear a more technical sense, and apply to a definite group or class of men, called 'the Wise' (Isaiah 29,14; Jer. 18,18; Ecc. 12,11). In the quotation from Jeremiah, the Wise are regarded as a class in society, in the same way as the prophets and the

1. Oesterley's views on the subject of date are interesting: "It may be stated with some confidence that the collections were made, approximately, as follows:  
 (2) (10,1-22,16) and (6) (25-29), the middle of the eighth cent. B.C.  
 (3) (22,17-23,14) (4) 23,15-24,22, and (5) (24,23-v.34), during the 7 cent. B.C.; a more precise date cannot be given;  
 (7) (30,1-v.14), (8) (30,15-v.33), and (9) (31,1-v.9), uncertain, but in all probability pre-exilic;  
 (1) (1,7-9) and 10(31,10-v.1), the 3 cent. B.C., and quite possibly later still." (The Book of Proverbs. p.26. Intro.)
2. "The Sept. is doubtless right in prefacing this collection with the title: 'Sayings of the Wise'. Originally this must have stood in the Hebr., but a scribe mistakenly put it into the text ('the words of the wise'); in place of this, following the Sept. again, we must read 'my words'; so that the line should run: 'Incline thine ear, and hear my words.'  
 (Oesterley. Ibid., p. 188.)

priests form a class.<sup>1</sup>

A few illustrative references to the Wise, however, seem to provide but a narrow foundation on which to build a theory regarding the existence of a regular school of religious teachers who, like the prophets and the priests, were a recognized part of the life of the people. Hints and echoes are not wanting in the earlier writings, however, that point in the same direction - for example 2 Sam. 14,1-3, and 2 Sam. 20, 16-22 with their references to wise women; the references to wise men, as in 1 Kings, 4,31 (to one of whom, Ethan the Ezrahite, is attributed the writing of Psalm 89); the interesting note in 2 Sam. 1,18 about the instruction that was to be given the children of Judah in the song of the bow (who were the instructors to be?); the mention in Josh. 15,15 of 'the city of the book' (Kiriath-sepher), or, following the Sept. 'the city of the scribes' (Kiriath-sopher), which as Oesterley says, "certainly suggests a centre of some kind in which the scribal art was pursued, and in which instruction would be given".<sup>2</sup> Again, there is the undoubted fact that in Egypt there was a definite class of State functionaries called scribes, whose

---

1. Cheyne. "The importance of the 'wise men' as a class is too seldom recognized....By constantly working on suitable individuals, they produced a moral sympathy with the prophets, without which those heroic men would have laboured in vain." (Job and Solomon. pp.123,124.)

2. The Book of Proverbs. W.O.E. Oesterley. p.69 (Intro.) To the whole section on the Chākāmim (pp.68-73) the above paragraph is indebted.

duty it was to hand on, by means of the written or spoken word, their political knowledge to those who would succeed them, and whose Wisdom writings were used as text-books by those who were training<sup>1</sup> to hold office in the State. As has already been shown, Egyptian and Hebrew Wisdom were mutually indebted, and the fact that the Wise men of Egypt played such an important part as scribes and teachers adds confirmation to the view that the Wise in Palestine held a somewhat analagous function. This theory is corroborated by evidence supplied in the writings of Ben-Sira, who in the second century combined in himself the office of wise man and scribe.<sup>2</sup> Since this last evidence is late, it is impossible to deduce much from it about the function and work of the Wise who lived some five hundred years before Ben-Sira's time. It is certain, however, that the special province of the Wise was the study and exposition of Wisdom,<sup>3</sup> and that it is the

1. pp. 3-6 of thesis.

2. In his 'Jerusalem under the High Priests', Edwyn Bevan says that at the time of Ben-Sira, a teacher, one of the Wise, would already hold his school in some definite place - a house of research (beth-hammid-rash). Bevan, however, admits that we do not know nearly as much about these schools of the Wise as we should like to know - for instance in what form they existed in the days of Isaiah and the earlier prophets.

3. Some views on the Wise:

Kent. "The evidence is conclusive that men and women, distinguished by the title 'wise', were found among the Hebrews before the prophet was more than a seer and before the offering of sacrifice was wholly delegated to a distinct class.... From the time of Solomon they seem to have taken their place - though that was not nearly so prominent - side by side with the

(contd. on next page)

## Views on the Wise (contd. from previous page).

priests and prophets. There is no indication that they wore any official garb as did the priests...The sole qualification was the possession of natural ability, developed by experience and education...The wise certainly were not a caste..Hardly can they be designated as an order. But they did constitute an important class in the old Hebrew commonwealth, and were united by common aims, ideas, teachings, and methods of work...In process of time...their teachings became more and more homogeneous, until there arose a wisdom school with certain well defined tenets. After the exile they gradually lost their originality and identity as teachers of practical personal righteousness and became scribes, interpreting and enforcing the ceremonial law."

(The Wise Men of Ancient Israel and their Proverbs. pp.21-23.)  
Oesterley. "We are justified in inferring that among the Hebrews, just as in Egypt and Babylon, the Chākāmim or 'Wise men' were one and the same as the Sōphērim or 'Scribes'...The conclusion does not admit of doubt that the Chākāmim came originally from the circle of the Scribes, not in the later sense of those who were occupied with the study and copying of the Scriptures, but in the earlier sense of the State functionary. It must have been at a relatively early period, at any rate while the monarchy was still in existence, that men, drawn at first from the circles of the Wisdom-Scribes, gradually narrowed down their activity to the study and collecting of wisdom material, thus forming themselves into a distinct body and becoming Chākāmim in the technical sense of Sages. Not that, at any rate in the case of some, more secular duties played no part; for Prov. 22,29 shows that the Wise man (the term mahir being applied to him proves that he was a scribe...) was still at times occupied with State affairs.....As Wise men in the more restricted sense they appear as the public teachers of religion and ethics...The basis of their teaching was Scripture, the influence of the prophetic writings being especially noticeable. But, as is becoming more and more recognized, they also went further afield and gathered material from extra-Israelite sources...There is much in the writings of the Sages to show their sympathy with the priesthood (see, e.g. Eccles.7,29-31). There can be no doubt that at one time the Wise men shared with the priests the duties of teaching both the observance of legal precepts and also of moral instruction. But in course of time each specialized in his particular domain, the priests becoming more and more occupied with the functions of their calling, while the Wise men concentrated on the teaching of ethics." p. 70-71.

Elmalia. "The Wise were never sharply differentiated from the rest of the community; they did not become a strict order or a caste like the priests, but remained a type or class; a class, however, of such importance that it could be spoken of in the same breath with the prophets and the priests. Egyptian analogies suggest that the Wise may have taken on themselves duties in the instruction of the young; but just what these early sages said and thought we cannot ascertain."

(Studies in Life from Jewish Proverbs. p.73.)

subject-matter of the book of Proverbs. Is it not reasonable, then, to suppose that the Wise were closely connected with the compilation of the book? The 'men of Hezekiah' who copied out 'the proverbs of Solomon' were doubtless renowned for their mental acumen, and, it may well be, for their teaching ability and their value as counsellors of state.

From a slightly different angle - an angle which the English title of the book does its best to obscure - it is clear that there must be a Wise man or a group of Wise men behind the various collections that go to make up Proverbs. The main part of the book, from chapter 10 to 29, consists of isolated maxims or 'proverbs'. These proverbs, however, are quite different from the homely aphorisms that light up every-day speech, and that are generally regarded as proverbs. The maxims contained in this old book of Hebrew Wisdom are poetical utterances, the work of cultured, cultivated scholars, who not infrequently succeed in making of the unpolished but pointed remarks of the market-place gems of real beauty, which please alike by their rhythmical form and their vividness of language. None of the aphorisms, says Toy, - "not even such as 'go to the ant, thou sluggard', or 'answer a fool according to his folly' - are popular proverbs or folk-sayings. They are all reflective and academic in tone, and must be regarded as the production of schools of moralists in a period of high moral culture."

The raw material on which the Wise men worked was very varied in kind. This is hinted at early in the first chapter of

Proverbs<sup>1</sup> where three different Hebrew words are used to describe the proverbs that follow - מִשְׁלָּה or *māshāl*, a "short pointed saying with reference to some striking feature in the life of an individual, or in human life generally, often clothed in figurative language;

הִלּוּל *m'lica*, perhaps a 'bent', 'oblique' or (as Sept.) 'dark' saying;<sup>2</sup> חִידָּה *khida*, a knotty or intricate saying, especially a riddle." Perhaps, as Oort suggests, the riddle was the basis from which many of the proverbs rose. "For example, Prov. 16:24 could well have had at first the form: 'What is as sweet as honey?

Pleasant discourse, for it is sweet to the soul and medicine to the bones! Similarly 26:17 : 'What is like seizing a dog by the ears? Meddling with a quarrel not your own.' Or 22:1 : 'What is worth more than gold? A good name.'<sup>3</sup> In addition to the 'short pointed saying', the 'dark saying' and the riddle, there was the fable, of which Prov. 6,11, with its well-known words about the ant, may be an elaboration. The bed-rock from which the greater part of the book was hewn, however, was neither the riddle nor the fable, but the '*māshāl*', the simple vivid speech of the street, easily remembered, oftentimes passed from mouth to mouth, valued for its picturesqueness of phrase and colour.

Such proverbs were in no sense peculiar to Israel. They formed a vital part of the speech and literary inheritance of the

1. 1,6.

2. Job and Solomon. F.K. Cheyne. p. 125.

3. The Wise Men of Ancient Israel and their Proverbs.  
C.F. Kent. p.51

ancient world. "Going back to the remotest antiquity", says Kelso, "we discover them embedded in the literary remains of Babylon and Egypt. The oldest are found in a Sumerian text...This (Sumerian) tablet has preserved some eighteen proverbs and riddles, some of which are very similar in structure to those of the Old Testament. Among the Egyptians the viziers Kagemne, Imhotep, and Ptahotep, of the 6th dynasty, put their wisdom into the form of proverbs. As these officials belong to the Old Kingdom, i.e. prior to 2500 B.C., some conception may be gained of the antiquity of proverbial literature among the Egyptians..... The proverb had reached a position of commanding influence among the Greeks prior to the great gnostic poets, Solon, Phocylides, and Theognis. The great lyric poets who preceded them, and the seven so-called wise men who followed, put into literary form the popular wisdom of preceding generations. ....Böhtlingk collected 7613 verses of Sanskrit gnostic poetry.... Among the Chinese, proverbs and proverbial sayings enjoy a similar position of high esteem.. The classics of the Chinese abound in them."<sup>1</sup> So too are the speech and literature of modern Europe salted with the condensed, epigrammatic wisdom of the proverbs of the nations that compose it.

Are there any points of resemblance between the proverbs of the ancient and the modern world? Is there any affinity between the proverbs of different nations? These questions can be

---

1. Hastings' Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics. Article of Proverbs. J.A.Kelso. pp.413-415.

answered without hesitation in the affirmative. In few respects can the essential unity of humanity be seen more clearly than in the strong family likeness that exists between its various proverbs. The music, the plastic arts, even the literature of one people may be difficult for those of another race to appreciate, but the proverbs of different peoples penetrate to a depth deeper than race or geography or time, and touch a common bedrock. Why is this?

The first reason is very simple - proverbs are the special property of the ordinary man. He is not interested in high philosophy or art; what interests him are the ordinary happenings of life, family concerns and business affairs, the drama of life and death. His thoughts do not reach the high, rarefied elevations where the thinkers and philosophers live, but what his interests lose in height, they gain in homeliness, humanity and universality. What the average man thinks and feels, countless others are also thinking and feeling. Consequently, if this ordinary person be gifted with the power of telling phrase, his words will strike home to the hearts of others, who will find in his remarks a sharp and memorable verbal expression of what they know by experience to be true.<sup>1</sup> "No saying is a proverb until it has commended itself to a number of men; the wisdom of one is not a proverb, but the wisdom of many."<sup>2</sup>

If the verbal expression of the point of view of the ordinary man is to become a proverb, it must be voiced in words

---

1. Cohen quotes Cervantes who defines a proverb as "a short sentence founded on a long experience."

2. Studies in Life from Jewish Proverbs. W.A.L.Elmslie. p.13.



that grip by their aptness and vividness. Three things, it has been said, go to the making of a proverb, 'shortness, sense and salt'.<sup>1</sup> Lord Russell describes a proverb as "The wisdom of many and the wit of one", and the wit of the one is as essential as the distilled wisdom of the many. It is, in large part, the literary format of a saying, its concreteness and picturesqueness of wording, its vivid phrasing, its economy of language, that give it its perennial charm, and its assured place among the proverbs.

In his "Studies in Life from Jewish Proverbs", another interesting characteristic is pointed out by the author - their educative influence. They lift the particular instance into the realm of the general; they hint at the principle that lies behind the isolated fact. "The proverb does for human life something that science does for the world of Nature: it rouses the unseeing eye and the unheeding ear to the marvel of what seems ordinary..... Science does not make Nature marvellous; she lifts the veil of ignorance from our mind. Proverbs perform the same service for the life of man. Taking the common incidents of experience, they point out their meaning. Perceiving the principles in the recurrent facts of life, they discover and declare that the commonplace is more than merely common."<sup>2</sup>

Because the subject-matter of proverbs deals with the ordinary, homely things of life, that affect one and all, proverbs of a similar character appear in different lands and among very

1. Quoted in Proverbs and Their Lessons. R.C. Trench. p.7

2. W.A.L. Elmslie. pp.18, 19.



cases, understood and appreciated by those of other lands, centring as they do round the common, basic interests of life.

These general characteristics of proverbs, their humanity and universality, their pungency of phrase, their educative influence, are all applicable to the proverbs contained in the Bible. In two respects, however, the book of Proverbs differs from other national collections of proverbs. The book belongs to the category of Wisdom literature, and in a real sense its contents are literature, as known and loved by the Hebrews. The proverbs are the work of poet and prose-writer, who bring to bear on the unpolished utterances of street and market-place, their knowledge of poetical form, their gift of rhythm, and their sense of words, with the result that a proverbial literature has been produced which has stood the test of ages. The effect of their work is seen alike in the words used, and in the metre in which the words are cast. A few illustrations will suffice to make plain the difference between the actual proverbs current in ancient Jewry, and the proverbs as they left the hands of the wise men.

"While (the thorn) is still young it produces prickles."

Rabb.Bl: 549.

"Even a child maketh himself known by his doings."

Prov. 20,11.

"The dog in his hunger swallows dung."

Rabb.Bl: 394.

"The full soul loatheth an honeycomb:

but to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet."

Prov. 27,7.

"Better is it to eat putrid fish (in peace)  
than the luxurious dish of the imprisoned."

Rabb.Bl: 289.

"Better is a dry morsel and quietness therewith  
than a house full of feasting and strife," Prov.17,1.

"Seven pits for the good man and one for the evil-doer."

Rabb. Bl. 621

"For a righteous man falleth seven times and riseth<sup>up</sup> again:  
but the wicked are overthrown by calamity."

Prov. 24,16.

(Ancient Jewish Proverbs. A. Cohen. pp. 31, 34, 37, 69.)

The difference in refinement is very marked; so too is the lessened use of the concrete, and of racy if vulgar speech.

Again, as a result of the work of the Wise, the proverb changes its form in another way, poetry taking the place of prose. The poetical forms used are of various kinds. There is the distich, with all its combinations of thought and relationship, for example -

synonymous -

"A man shall be satisfied with good by the fruit of his  
mouth:

And the doings of a man's hands shall be rendered unto him."  
12,14.

antithetic -

"He that gathereth in summer is a wise son:

But he that sleepeth in harvest is a son that causeth  
shame." 10,5.

synthetic -

"The law of the wise is a fountain of life,  
To depart from the snares of death." 13,14.

integral -

"The righteous shall be recompensed on the earth:  
How much more the wicked and the sinner." 11,31.

parabolic -

"Pleasant words are as an honeycomb,  
Sweet to the soul, and health to the bones." 16,24.

Nor is the unit of thought limited to two lines. It may extend from three to eight lines, forming a tristich, tetrastich,

pentastich, heptastich, or octastich<sup>1</sup> - if these latter be not more

---

1. Tristich - 24,27

"Prepare thy work without,  
And make it ready for thee in the field;  
And afterwards build thine house."

(This form is not common in Proverbs. When it does appear, as in the above, and 27,10, it looks as if the fourth line may have disappeared.)

Tetrastich -

"Through wisdom is an house builded;  
And by understanding it is established:  
And by knowledge are the chambers filled  
With all precious and pleasant riches." 24,3 and 4.

Pentastich -

"Weary not thyself to be rich;  
Cease from thine own wisdom.  
Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not?  
For riches certainly make themselves wings,  
Like an eagle that flieth toward heaven." 23,4 and 5.

Of six-line forms, a possible example would be 23,1-3, but owing to the probable disarrangement of the passage and the verses that follow, it cannot be taken as a satisfactory specimen.

"When thou sittest to eat with a ruler,  
Consider diligently him that is before thee;  
And put a knife to thy throat,  
If thou be a man given to appetite.  
Be not desirous of his dainties;  
Seeing they are deceitful meat." 23,1-3.

Heptastich - of which there is only one in the collection -

"Eat not the bread of him that hath an evil eye,  
Neither desire thou his dainties:  
For as he reckoneth within himself, so is he:  
Eat and drink, saith he to thee;  
But his heart is not with thee.  
The morsel which thou hast eaten shalt thou vomit up,  
And lose thy sweet words." 23,6-8.

Octastich, or māsāl ode -

"Two things have I asked of thee;  
Deny me them not before I die:  
Remove far from me vanity and lies:  
Give me neither poverty nor riches;  
Feed me with the food that is needful for me:  
Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord?  
Or lest I be poor, and steal,  
And use profanely the name of my God." 30, 7-9

[N.B. For the suggestions worked out above the writer is indebted to Delitzsch's Commentary, pp.7-12.)

truly called māshāl odes.

The second characteristic that pre-eminently distinguishes the book of Proverbs from other national collections of proverbs is the unity of thought which pervades the book. The conception of wisdom is the connecting thread on which all the varied aphorisms of the collection are strung. The aim of the whole work is given in the opening words - 'Proverbs of Solomon ... (written) that men may know wisdom and instruction'; the thought of wisdom is implicit in the verse that forms the key-stone of the collection - "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge"<sup>1</sup>; the section containing the earliest proverbs in the book opens with the simple words, "A wise son maketh a glad father"<sup>2</sup>; "Incline thine ear, and hear my words and apply thine heart unto my knowledge"<sup>3</sup> forms the preamble to the 'Sayings of the Wise'; the maxims of the sage who addresses his son begin with the words "My son, if thine heart be wise, My heart shall be glad, even mine"<sup>4</sup>; whether the fragment by Agur is to be taken in an ironic sense or as an honest confession of weakness, its burden is his lack of wisdom - "Surely I am more brutish than any man, And have not the understanding of a man: And I have not learned wisdom, Neither have I the knowledge of the Holy One"<sup>5</sup>. With this underlying unity of thought running through the various sections, it is little wonder that the writer of the introduction

---

1. 1,7. "This verse is a kind of leit-motif to the whole collection; it stands quite by itself, being unconnected with what precedes and follows." (Oesterley. The Book of Proverbs. p.5.)

2. 10,1.

3. 22,17. Thus the Sept.

4. 23,15.

5. 30, 2 and 3.

to the book (ch.1-9) makes wisdom the burden of his words. He mentions 'Wisdom' by name twenty-one times, and Wisdom forms the subject of his beautiful poem in chapter eight - a chapter which for charm of workmanship and depth of thought reaches the high water mark of the book.

It is not, however, simply the emphasis placed by Proverbs on Wisdom that distinguishes this section of Hebrew Scripture - Egyptian and Babylonian thought also stressed the importance of Wisdom. What renders Proverbs specially remarkable is the natural, unselfconscious way the writers join together right thinking, right living and God. The Divine Name is used with no great frequency. In chapters 10-22, v.16, for example, the words 'the Lord' occur fifty-two times, and 'Maker' twice - i.e. only about one distich<sup>1</sup> out of seven mentions God. If the book as a whole be considered, the proportion leans still more on the side of reticence.<sup>2</sup> Yet even a cursory reading of Proverbs makes it plain that the foundation of the whole is God. It is from Him that the Wisdom is derived which renders possible the living of a life in accordance with His will. Although this conception is the premiss from which the whole book is deduced, it is to a certain extent implicit rather than explicit. The idea is not clearly articulated and defined. It seems wiser, therefore, to begin from the straightforward teaching of Proverbs on the subject of man's life and

---

1. Ch. 10-22,16 contains 375 verses.

2. The book contains 915 verses, and the Divine Name is mentioned 97 times.

conduct, and to work up from that to its thought of wisdom and its conception of God; in a word, to let its ethics be one's guide to the philosophy and theology of the book.

---



(2)

The Teaching of Proverbs.

A.

On Man, in his Various Relationships.

It is natural that a book which centres round the conception of Wisdom should have much to say of those who are wise in mind and heart and conduct. To the Hebrew, the wise man was one who was not only endowed with mental ability, but who was equally rich in moral power and insight. The conception of human wisdom that is developed in the book of Proverbs has both a far wider range, and a greater fulness and delicacy of meaning than the English word connotes. The richness of the Hebrew vocabulary at this point puts the English language to shame. It is hardly possible to translate into our tongue the many Hebrew words, with their delicate shades of meaning, that are used to describe the different facets of wisdom. For example, there is

בִּינָה	Binah, i.e.	"the trained intelligence which rightly discriminates between things that differ and approves things that are excellent.";
תְּבוּנָה	Tebhunah,	"insight, discernment";
מוֹסֵר	Mūsār,	"the instruction and discipline which leads to knowledge";
דָּעָה	Da'ath,	"the resulting knowledge, acquired and possessed;"
מְצִיטָה	Mezimmah,	"the meditation or counsel which leads to discreet action";
עֲרֵמָה	'Ormah	(more frequently in the adjectival form);

סֶכֶל

Sekel,

"the prudence which results from careful consideration of consequences and wise judgment in relation to them." 1

Not only is the lack of exactitude in the English vocabulary an obstacle in the way of conveying the full significance of wisdom as it presented itself to the Hebrew mind, but there is the additional difficulty that certain English words dealing with wisdom, which originally had a morally neutral meaning, have acquired with the passage of time a sinister flavour. "It is noteworthy", says Davison, "how many English words which by their etymology indicate only knowledge or skill have come to be used in a bad sense; e.g. subtilty, cunning, knowingness, artfulness, craft and craftiness. In Hebrew there is a noble group of lofty words which we in these degenerate days find it hard to match, some of the words we are obliged to use in translation having associations of a lower or secondary kind of which we cannot rid them. For example, 'prudence' and 'discretion' give a much more worldly flavour to the virtues of which the Proverbs speak than the original words convey; while with us 'intelligence' and 'understanding' have properly speaking no moral quality at all."<sup>2</sup>

If one overcomes these obstacles which the English translation of the Hebrew original places in one's path, one finds that wisdom is a many-sided term, which expresses itself in multiple ways - now in the mental processes of the trained mind, now in the slow laborious education that is the necessary preparation for the wise mastery of life, now in a quick flash of intuition, and now

---

1. As trans. in The Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament.  
W.T.Davison. p.158.

2. Ibid. p. 159.

in conduct that charms and inspires by its aptness and beauty and value.

The delineation of a life that expresses this full-orbed view of wisdom is very detailed and concrete. The wise man is humble;<sup>1</sup> conscious of how little knowledge he has, "he is eager to know more".<sup>2</sup> His enthusiasm for wisdom is so great, that he actually loves to be corrected,<sup>3</sup> because thereby he draws nearer his goal. He is too assured in his own inner strength to be restive under the voice of authority. He is strong enough to accept and obey the commands of his superiors, because their orders are in harmony with the inner law of his own life.<sup>4</sup> Open-eyed and observant, he sees the unhappy consequences that flow from wrong actions and foolish talk, and he himself is cautious and prudent alike in deed and speech. On this latter point, the

- 
1. "With the lowly is wisdom." 11,2.
  2. Moffatt's trans. 15,14. "The heart of him that hath understanding seeketh knowledge." (R.V.)
  3. "Whose loveth correction loveth knowledge." 12,1. (In margin of R.V. 'instruction' takes the place of 'correction', but, says Oesterley, 'the underlying thought of discipline, or correction..must not be lost sight of'.)  
The same idea of the advantage of correction is expressed also in 12,15; 15, 31 and 32.
  4. "The wise in heart will receive commandments." 10,17.

book of Proverbs is emphatic.<sup>1</sup> Reference is again and again made to the fact that the wise man shows his wisdom in his restraint of speech. Knowing the influence and potency of words, he thinks before he speaks,<sup>2</sup> and often he does not speak at all.<sup>3</sup> He does

1. The value of silence was a thought much stressed in the ancient world. (The modern world, too, through some of its proverbs, shows that the need for reticence has not entirely disappeared - e.g. the English proverb (like the Persian) "Speech is silver, but silence is golden", and the Italian "There is little conscience in great eloquence".)

The emphasis laid, alike in Hebrew, Babylonian, Egyptian and Chinese Wisdom, on the value of reticence is remarkable. Cf. the following -

Jewish. "Speech for a shekel, silence for two." Rabbi Jehoshua.

"Silence is the cure of a thing." A Rabbi.

"Whoso multiplieth words occasioneth sin."

Pirque Aboth, 1.17.

"Be swift in hearing  
But slow in replying.  
If thou canst, answer thy neighbour,  
But if not - hand on mouth.  
Glory and dishonour come through speaking.  
And the tongue of a man is his fall."

(Ecclus. 5.11-13.)

Babylonian. "Slander shalt thou not speak, nor counsel which is not sure;

He that maketh gossip, despised is his head."

"Make not wide thy mouth, but guard thy lips;  
The thoughts of thy mind thou shalt not speak at once,  
For then quickly what thou hast spoken thou wilt take back again."

(Book of Proverbs. Langdon. pp.88,91.)

Egyptian. "He that concealeth his speech within himself  
Is better than he who uttereth it to his hurt."

(Amen-em-ope. 221,22,15 and 16.)

Chinese. See pp. 197,285,286 of thesis.

2. "The heart of the righteous studieth to answer", 15,28.  
Moffatt has it "A good man ponders what to say".
3. "Wise men lay up (or conceal) knowledge", 10,14, or, as in Moffatt, "Sensible men are reticent". See also 10,19, "He that refraineth his lips doeth wisely" and 12,23 and 17,27. Delitzsch's comment on this passage (10,14) is - "As to <sup>לִשְׁכָּתוֹ</sup> it is worthy of remark that in the Beduin, <sup>ضبط</sup> fut.i, signifies to be still, to be thoughtful, to be absorbed in oneself." p. 218. Comment.

not vent his anger in speech; instead, he "keepeth it back and" (a beautiful touch) "stilleth it".<sup>1</sup> His conversation has no unfortunate consequences; "Wisdom keeps the lips of the wise, so that no word of self-reflection, especially none that can wound a neighbour, escapes them".<sup>2</sup> Instead of the speech of the wise hurting others, it is educative in its effects,<sup>3</sup> appealing to those who hear it by its inherent charm and sweetness. So truly does the wise man's speech express the inner poise and fragrance of his spirit, that it can be compared to 'deep waters' and a 'flowing brook'.<sup>4</sup> Unlike the talk of others that disintegrates and wounds, his words are health-giving and creative. "There is healing power in thoughtful words."<sup>5</sup> A wise man of this calibre is the kind of person who can penetrate to the deep places in the lives of others, drawing to the surface the evil that is poisoning the whole life, or evoking the hidden seeds of goodness.<sup>6</sup>

1. 29,11. Also, 14,29 -  
"He that is slow to anger is of great understanding."
2. Delitzsch's comment on 14,3 -  
"In the mouth of the foolish is a rod of pride;  
But the lips of the wise shall preserve them."
3. "The lips of the wise disperse knowledge." 15,7.  
"The wise in heart shall be called prudent:  
And the sweetness of the lips increaseth understanding."  
16,21; or, as Moffat has it  
"A wise man is esteemed for being pleasant;  
His friendly words add to his influence."
4. 18,4.
5. Moffatt's trans. 12,18. "The tongue of the wise is health."
6. "Counsel in the heart of man is like deep water;  
But a man of understanding will draw it out." 20,5.

While the wise man is effective as a moral force in the community, his wisdom is equally seen in the ordering of his own life. He "maketh straight his going".<sup>1</sup> His spiritual force proves stronger and more effective than the might of mere physical power -

"A wise man scaleth the city of the mighty,  
And bringeth down the strength of the confidence thereof."<sup>2</sup>

Equally full and penetrating is the picture given in Proverbs of the good man, of him who is upright,<sup>3</sup> lowly,<sup>4</sup> and righteous.<sup>5</sup> Fundamental in his life is the fact of God, Whom he reveres<sup>6</sup> and trusts,<sup>7</sup> in Whom is his strong confidence,<sup>8</sup> and from Whom he accepts rebuke.<sup>9</sup> What is the inner spirit of such a man? What is he like in the secret recesses of his heart? If he would become master of himself, he must be scrupulously careful of that part of his life which is unknown to all but himself. "More than all guarding keep thy heart" is the wise advice given by the writer

1. 15,21.
2. 21,22.
3. "He that walketh in his uprightness feareth the Lord." 14,2.
4. "With the lowly is wisdom." 11,2. ('Lowly', Oesterley points out, is a rare word in the O.T., occurring only here and in Mic. 6,8)
5. "The thoughts of the righteous are just (counsels)." 12,5.
6. "He that walketh in his uprightness feareth the Lord." 14,2.
7. "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart." 3,5.
8. "He that feareth the Lord hath strong confidence." 14,26  
(Oesterley's emendation.)
9. "Despise not the chastening of the Lord." 3,11.

of the introduction,<sup>1</sup> and an earlier proverb puts the same truth in a different way, when it says, "The merciful man doeth good to his own soul."<sup>2</sup> There is, however, nothing weak about the good man; there is in him not a trace of that spiritual valetudinarianism which, in the effort to have peace and calm, shrinks back from the struggle and conflict of life. He "hateh lying", or literally "a word of deceit".<sup>3</sup> That same downright strength that shows itself in his hatred of falsehood, shows itself as plainly in the courage with which he meets the vicissitudes of life. He is "bold as a lion."<sup>4</sup> With a conscience void of offence,<sup>5</sup> he naturally is happy. "The righteous doth sing and rejoice."6

Still more detailed is the picture of the good man as he is described in his relationships with others. Like "a sensible man (he) ignores an affront"<sup>6</sup> and "keeps silent about heedless

1. 4,23 - the literal trans. given by Oesterley of "Keep thy heart with all diligence", or, as the R.V. has it, "Above all that thou guardest keep thy heart."

2. 11,17.

3. 13,5. "A good man hates deception." Moffatt.  
 "Even one atom of untruth or insincerity is lying talk."  
 (Chinese saying. Dr. Medh. Dial. p.166 quoted by Malan. Notes on the Proverbs. Vol. 2, p.166.)

4. 28,1. "The Hebrew root means 'to trust', so that 'confident' is the better word to use" - confident as a young lion.  
 (Oesterley. p. 247.)

5. 29,6b. This interpretation would stand equally well if the verse be emended to run - "doth run and rejoice". See also 16,20 - "Whoso trusteth in the Lord, happy is he."

6. Toy's trans. of 12,16b.

speeches".<sup>1</sup> "It is his glory to pass over a transgression."<sup>2</sup>  
 With tale-bearing he will have nothing to do. "He that goeth  
 about as a talebearer revealeth secrets: But he that is of a faith-  
 ful spirit concealeth the matter."<sup>3</sup> He is like the wise man in  
 the creative influence of his speech. It is like 'choice silver'<sup>4</sup>  
 or a 'fountain of life';<sup>5</sup> it "puts forth buds of wisdom".<sup>6</sup> The  
 good man is not only apt and true in speech, he is also effective  
 and kind in deed. He is interested in and works for the poor -  
 not as one who finds in them a convenient object for his patronage,  
 but as one who recognises their rights as men, and is willing to  
 plead their case in a court of justice.<sup>7</sup> When cases of need come  
 before his notice, he "giveth and withholdeth not".<sup>8</sup> His thought-  
 fulness extends to the lower creatures. "A righteous man re-  
 gardeth the life of his beast", or, as Delitzsch more expressively

- 
1. Explanatory footnote in the Cent. Proverbs to 17,9.
  2. 19,11. Oesterley points out that 'to pass over' in the sense of forgiving is a rare use of the Hebrew word.
  3. 11,13. "The second line of this quotation is from the syriac. Cf. also The Proverbs of Achikar 2,2 and 3: 'If thou hast heard a word, let it die in thy heart, and reveal it to no man.'" (Oesterley. p. 85.)
  4. 10,20.
  5. 10,11.
  6. 10,31. (Moffatt's trans.)
  7. 29,7. "The righteous taketh knowledge of the cause of the poor."
  8. 21,26.



puts it, "The righteous knows how his cattle feel".<sup>1</sup> Such a man is not thoughtful of others at the expense of his own home people. He "leaveth an inheritance to his children's children".<sup>2</sup> Naturally a person of this type is popular.<sup>3</sup>

What is the setting amid which the good man passes his days? The writers of Proverbs were certain of two things - that God was with the righteous, and that the favour of the Almighty was seen in the happy, prosperous circumstances of the good man's life.

"He layeth up sound wisdom for the upright,<sup>4</sup>  
He is a shield to them that walk in integrity."

Sometimes the blessing of God was shown in positive ways -

"The reward of humility and the fear of the Lord  
Is riches, and honour, and life."<sup>5</sup>

Sometimes, it is the negative side that is emphasised. The good man will be rewarded by the cessation of his enemies' ill-will,<sup>6</sup> or by the confidence that he will be kept from harm.<sup>7</sup>

1. 12,10. Delitzsch prefers his rendering on the ground that  $\text{וְיָדָע}$  signifies also 'the frame of mind, the state of feeling' and that  $\text{וְיָדָע}$  has, as in the related proverb, 27,23, the meaning of careful cognizance or investigation, in conformity with which one acts'. Commentary, p.255. Cf. Deut.25,4 - "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn."

2. 13,22.

3. 11,10. "When good men prosper, the city rejoices."  
(Moffatt's trans.)

4. 2,7. "He has help ready for the upright, he is a shield for those who live honestly." (Moffatt's trans.)

5. 22,4.

6. 16,7. "When a man's ways please the Lord, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him."

7. 12,21. "There shall no mischief happen to the righteous."

As old age creeps on, the blessing of God still follows him,  
 keeping him from a too speedy entrance to Sheol.<sup>1</sup> When death can  
 no longer be delayed, he will have his reward in a name that is  
 revered and honoured by his descendants.<sup>2</sup>

The vivid pictures which the book of Proverbs gives of  
 the wise and the good man, have their counterpart in equally de-  
 tailed descriptions of 'the fool' and the bad man. The minute  
 workmanship of these sombre studies tends to repel the modern  
 mind. Alike from the psychological and educational point of view,  
 it would be better - so the twentieth century might argue - to  
 stress the positive side, and leave alone the delineation of the  
 characters of those whose lives are of so little value. Such a  
 position would be reasonable enough were the subject under purview  
 an ethical treatise in the English language. We are, however,  
 dealing with a classical specimen of Hebrew literature in poetical  
 form, and one of the recognised forms of Hebrew poetry is the  
 antithetic, in which the second line is placed in sharp contrast  
 with the thought of the first. If this type of poetry is to be  
 used, therefore, the picture of the good man requires to be  
 followed by a thumb-nail sketch of the bad. Moreover, Proverbs

---

1. 15,24. "To the wise the Way of life goeth upward, That he may  
 depart from Sheol beneath." "The probability..is", says  
 Oesterley, that 'upward' and 'beneath' "do not belong to the  
 original text, but were added later when more developed ideas  
 regarding the future life had arisen." The lines could thus  
 be read "A path of life (there is) for the wise; That he may  
 depart from Sheol." p. 123.

2. 10,7. "The memory of the just is blessed."

is something more than a work of literature. It is a book on ethics, and it is impossible to compile a treatise on such a subject and leave out the element which forms such an important factor in that sphere, the problem of evil. When the Semitic mind came to grips with that fact in the book of Proverbs, it wrestled with it, not in abstract fashion, but in the concrete form of 'the fool' or bad man. Again, the Hebrew sages saw further than those who would seek to conquer evil by ignoring it. Their knowledge of human nature was deep, and it might seem to them that there were men whom appeals to good left unmoved. Such persons as these might be won to righteousness by fear; they might be arrested in their downward course by lurid glimpses of the fate that awaited them, and the abrupt stoppage of their descent might prove their salvation.

It is unnecessary to describe 'the fool' in as detailed a fashion as the wise man has been depicted, since at point after point, the former is simply the opposite of the latter. He is proud,<sup>1</sup> self-confident,<sup>2</sup> and dislikes being reprov<sup>3</sup>ed. He speaks without think<sup>4</sup>ing; the least thing makes him angry,<sup>5</sup> and his anger

1. 14,3. "In the mouth of the foolish is a rod of pride."
2. 14,16. "The fool beareth himself insolently, and is confident." Another possible rendering is, "But the fool takes part (in evil), confidently." (Cesteriye, p.110) Delitzsch feels that something stronger is required, and renders it, "But the fool loseth his wits and is regardless." p.301.
3. 15,12. "A scorner loveth not to be reprov<sup>3</sup>ed."
4. 18,13. "He that giveth answer before he heareth, It is folly and shame unto him."
5. 14,29. "He that is hasty of spirit exalteth folly." See also 14,17.

gushes forth in a storm of words.<sup>1</sup> His talk is disintegrating in its effects<sup>2</sup> - naturally, since the inner spring from which it flows is tainted and worthless at the source. "The thought of the foolish<sup>3</sup> is sin." In contrast with the capacity of the wise man, who makes a success of everything he undertakes, 'the fool' is ineffective<sup>4</sup> and is held in no esteem. People do not take him seriously.<sup>5</sup> His eyes "are in the ends of the earth".<sup>6</sup> He is such a drag on the community, that stern measures must be taken; something drastic must be done to put an end to his folly -

"A whip for the horse, a bridle for the ass,  
And a rod for the back of fools." 7

An unhappy object at all times, he is seen in the most unfavourable light of all when good fortune and prosperity are his portion, so incapable is he of making use of them.

1. 29,11. "A fool uttereth all his anger" - lit. "bringeth forth all his spirit". (Oesterley, p.261.)
2. 6,27. "A worthless man deviseth mischief: And in his lips there is as a scorching fire"; 'deviseth' lit. is 'diggeth', the idea being that of digging a pit into which the victim falls." (Oesterley, p.136.) Moffatt renders it, "The rascal sets mischief afoot, his words scorch like a fire." See also 6,30. "He that shutteth his eyes, it is to devise forward things: He that compresseth his lips bringeth evil to pass." The reference is "to a facial expression more eloquent than words; it is the method of conveying to an observer the imputation of a lie or a slander without uttering it." (Oesterley, p.136.)
3. 24,9a.
4. 26,1. "As snow in summer, and as rain in harvest, So honour is not seemly for a fool."
5. 26,1-12.
6. 17,24b.
7. 26,3.

"For three things the earth doth tremble,  
 And for four, which it cannot bear:  
 For a servant when he is king;  
 And a fool when he is filled with meat." 1

As the Hebrew language is rich in words to describe the various shades of meaning that come under the English term 'wise', it is also well adapted to delineate the various grades of folly. The word most frequently used is פֶּתִי or 'pethi'; it characterises the type of fool whose folly is least ingrained, and for whom there is a faint possibility that he may be removed to a better category. The word describes one who "is without experience", because of his youth, but "he is thought of as teachable.. But though capable of learning better the Pethi has no anxiety to do so". He is "unstable, of weak will, and therefore easily led into temptation". He is stupid and credulous. "Only once is it said that the Pethi is deliberate in his folly, otherwise he is always stupid rather than actively vicious... A redeeming quality regarding the Pethi is that he has at least the sense to take warning when he sees others punished:

"Smite a scorner, and the simple (pethi) will learn prudence 19,25.

'When the scorner is punished the simple (pethi) is made wise.' 21,11.

Worse than the Pethi are the כֶּסֶל 'kēsîl' and the עֲוִיל 'evîl', the latter, if anything, being more depraved. "Of the Kēsîl it may be said that he is characterized by obstinate stupidity; and of the 'Evîl' that he is, in addition, licentious; both are always morally bad. Both differ from the Pethi in being avowedly and of

---

1. 30,21 and 22. 'filled with meat' means 'in prosperity'.

set purpose wicked. If the Pethi is weak and silly, these two are strong-willed and use their brains for bad ends. "It is as sport to a fool to do wickedness"(kēsîl), 10,23. "Every fool ('evîl will be quarrelling." 20,3. "Both types are regarded as incorrigible:-

'A rebuke entereth deeper into one that hath understanding, Than a hundred stripes into a fool (kēsîl).' 17,10.

'Though thou shouldest bray a fool ('evîl) in a mortar, Yet will not his foolishness depart from him.' 27,22.

But perhaps the most objectionable type of all is that known under the name of לִצְנֵן Lîtz('scorner'), for he is as much an enemy to God and men as to himself... There is a supercilious arrogance about him which men naturally resent:-

'The proud and haughty man, scorner is his name, He worketh in the arrogance of pride.' 21,24.

His quarrelsomeness and mischief-making..(set) a whole community at loggerheads - 'Scornful men set a city in a flame', 29,8a - (and) any attempt to improve him only results in making matters worse... Finally, there are three references to the type called the לִצְנֵן Nābāl, the dull-witted, churlish man in whose mouth sensible words are out of place (17,7), who is a cause of grief to his father (17,21) and of whom it is humorously said that if such an impossible thing should happen that he became prosperous, it would make the earth tremble."

---

1. pp.103 and 104 are summarised or quoted from Oesterley's Proverbs, Excursus 11, pp. 85-87 (Introduction.)

So finely drawn are the meshes of the description, that it is doubtful if any of the fools of Palestine would be able to escape from being caught within the net.

The book of Proverbs has much to say of woman - surprisingly much in view of the subordinate position that women occupied, on the whole, in Jewish thought. The J and E documents, it is true, give women a high place. Whether the tales they contain be regarded as capturing something of the free and vigorous spirit of the nomadic days of which they tell, or whether they are looked on as expressing the spiritual and moral point of view of those who, centuries later, wrote them down, they certainly accord to women no mean position. Abraham is commanded 'to hearken unto' Sarah 'in all that' she said;<sup>1</sup> Rebekah's permission has to be obtained before a journey is begun;<sup>2</sup> Deborah acts as prophetess and judge;<sup>3</sup> and as Hannah decides the career of her son, no mention is made of the father's advice or consent.<sup>4</sup> Such an age, or such a point of view, certainly cannot be charged with resting under the shadow of male domination and female subordination. In the laws of Israel, however, a different spirit is expressed. The woman is regarded as inferior to the man. "The father's power over his daughters was practically unlimited; he could sell them into bondage,<sup>5</sup> with the object of their becoming

---

1. Gen. 21,12.

2. " 24,57 and 58.

3. Judges 4,4,

4. 1 Sam. 1,22.

5. Ex. 21,7-9.

the wives of their masters or of their sons, but the daughters must be under the age of puberty, and the course was only excused by extreme poverty. A daughter's hand, however, could always be disposed of by her father: 'I gave my daughter to this man....'<sup>1</sup> The Mosaic law gave inheritance to the daughters when there were no sons, and to the sisters or aunts when there were no brothers, but in no case to the mother.... A curious light on the comparative estimate of boys and girls is given by the law saying that a woman shall be purified thirty-three days after the birth of a son, but sixty-six after that of a daughter."<sup>2</sup> "In the Old Testament, speaking generally", says Oesterley, "woman is thought of and spoken of almost wholly from the point of view of man. Marriage is for the man's benefit, not the woman's; she is useful to him, she looks after the household, ministers to his comfort, bears children; all for the man; the woman is not considered; she can be divorced, but she cannot divorce her husband; he can have a couple of wives or more, and concubines if he can afford to keep them all; she may only have one husband."<sup>3</sup>

Such was the point of view of the law, and such was the point of view of the Old Testament as a whole, but it was not the point of view of the people as shown in their proverbs, nor of the wise as shown in their aphorisms, as these are recorded in the book under discussion.

1. Deut. 22, 16.

2. Lev. 12. The quotation is from "Woman in World History", E.M. White, pp. 169, 170.

3. The Book of Proverbs. H.O.E. Oesterley. Excursus 10, p. 80, Introduction.



Whatever the woman of Proverbs may be, she is assuredly no cipher. In the Introduction in ch.1-9, the vigour with which the writer denounces 'the strange woman' <sup>1</sup> הַזָּרָה הַשֵּׁנִי, is an unhappy tribute to her power. When it is the contentious woman that is the subject under discussion, the highest wisdom for the other sex is shown to lie in retreat.

"It is better to dwell in the corner of the housetop,  
Than with a contentious woman in a wide house." <sup>2</sup>

When the centre of interest turns from the woman of the street and the quarrelsome wife to the woman after man's own heart, the writers are outspoken in their praise of her charm, <sup>3</sup> her prudence, <sup>4</sup> her strength of character. <sup>5</sup> The value of such a woman is appraised very simply in the words,

"Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing,  
And obtaineth favour of the Lord." <sup>6</sup>

The same thought finds expression in the beautiful picture of the

1. 2,16-19; 5,3-14; 6,24-35; and ch. 7.  
"Prostitution was partly sanctioned in the culture of the Midianites, Syrians, and other nations neighbouring to Israel.. In Israel, on the contrary, the law (Deut. 23,18 f.) forbade it..., and therefore it was chiefly practised by foreign women."  
(Delitzsch. Comment. Vol.1, p.81.)
2. 21,9 and 25,24, where, curiously, the proverb is repeated.  
Moffatt renders it, "Better a corner on the roof than a room with a nagging wife".
3. 11,16. "A gracious woman retaineth honour."
4. 19,14. "A prudent wife is from the Lord."
5. 12,4. "A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband." אֵשֶׁת חַיִּיל suggests strength and power more than is apparent in 'virtuous woman'.
6. 18,22. 'a good thing' is better expressed by 'good fortune'.

virtuous woman as given in chapter 31, where characteristic after characteristic is pointed out for admiration and praise - her far-sighted business capacity,<sup>1</sup> her energy,<sup>2</sup> her physical strength,<sup>3</sup> her domestic skill,<sup>4</sup> her generosity,<sup>5</sup> her common-sense,<sup>6</sup> her excellence as wife and mother,<sup>7</sup> her deeply religious spirit.<sup>8</sup> The measure of the tribute paid her is evidenced by the fact that the compliment given her is even greater than that afforded to Wisdom itself. Whereas Wisdom is 'better than rubies', the virtuous woman is 'far above rubies'.<sup>9</sup> It is not without significance too that Wisdom is personified as a woman. The use of such a

- 
1. 31,12 and 14. "She brings him (i.e. her husband) profit and no loss, from first to last.. She is like merchant-ships, fetching food-stuffs from afar." Moffatt's trans.
  2. 31,15. "She riseth also while it is yet night."
  3. 31,17. "She girdeth her loins with strength, And moveth vigorously her arms." Delitzsch's trans.
  4. 31,15b,19,21,etc. "She giveth meat to her household...She layeth her hands to the distaff, And her hands hold the spindle..She is not afraid of the snow for her household; For all her household are clothed with scarlet (perhaps, double garments)."
  5. 31,20. "She spreadeth out her hand to the poor."
  6. 31,26. "She talks shrewd sense, and offers kindly counsel." Moffatt's trans.
  7. 31,28. "Her children rise up, and call her blessed; Her husband also and he praiseth her...".
  8. 31,30. "A woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised." It is possible that this religious seal set on the poem may be the work of a later writer.
  9. The writer is indebted for this thought to T.K. Cheyne in his Job and Solomon, p.155.

figure of speech would have been impossible had womanhood been despised.<sup>1</sup> "The fact remains", says Oesterley, "that Proverbs is the only Old Testament book in which a rational estimation of Woman is found."<sup>2</sup>

It is, however, hardly woman as woman to whom honour is given. It is to woman as wife, and still more as mother, that the tributes of Proverbs are paid. In the home her power equals that of her husband; the responsibilities, joys and sorrows of parenthood are shared.<sup>3</sup> The mother's words are to be obeyed as much as the father's.<sup>4</sup> Implicit in the detailed teaching on the building and conduct of the home is the fact of monogamy.<sup>5</sup> One wife for one husband is the Hebrew ideal.

With such an ideal there naturally goes a noble conception of home-life. Children are to be taken seriously, and much thought is to be given to their training. Physical punishment is regarded as an essential part of a child's training. In

1. For this the writer is indebted to E.M. White in "Woman in World History", p. 168.

2. The Book of Proverbs. W.O.E. Oesterley. Excursus 10. p.84. Intro.

3. 10,1. "A wise son maketh a glad father: But a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother." See also 17,25; and 23,22-25.

4. 1,8. "My son, hear the instruction of thy father, And forsake not the law of thy mother." See also, 30,17.

5. See 11,16; 19,14; 12,4; and 18,22, which are quoted in foot-notes on p. 107; ch.31, excerpts from which are quoted on p. 108, and ch. 5,15-19.

it the writer has fullest confidence; it cannot fail.

"Thou shalt beat him with the rod,  
And shalt deliver his soul from Sheol." 1

It is equally effective in its positive results - "The rod and  
reproof give wisdom". 2

So numerous are the references to foolish sons, 3 and  
so heavy is the emphasis on physical punishment, 4 that the picture  
given of children and their treatment is certainly of a very  
sombre kind. With such a theory as the sages had of child  
nature - "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child" - it  
could not well be otherwise. The radically different conception  
of childhood suggested in the words, "Of such is the kingdom of  
heaven", still lay deeply hidden in the womb of the future. If  
the Wise had little thought of the intrinsic value and beauty of  
child nature, they had a sound grasp of certain educational  
principles. For one, they realised the impossibility of

1. 23,14. "You must whip him with the rod, and so preserve his  
life." See also, 20,30; 22,15.

2. 29,15. "Better, 'the rod of reproof'."

3. 10,1; 15,20; 17,21; 17,25; 19,13; 28,7; 29,3;  
The book of Proverbs has nothing to say of foolish daughters,  
but it is of interest to see what Ben Sirach has to say on  
the subject - "A daughter is a secret cause of wakefulness to  
a father; and the care for her putteth away sleep" (here  
follows a formidable list of the anxieties a daughter, married  
or single, in youth or age, causes her father). Then comes  
the advice - "Keep a strict watch over a headstrong daughter,  
lest she make thee a laughing-stock to thine enemies, a byword  
in the city and notorious among the people, and shame thee  
before the multitude." Ecclesiasticus 42, 9-11.

4. 13,24; 19,18; 20,30; 22,15; 23,13-14; 26,3; 29,15 and 17.

5. 22,15.

separating the moral and intellectual education of a child.

"That which the Jew called  $\text{רִדּוּת}$ , which the Greeks called  $\text{παιδεία}$  and which we may define as 'instruction imparted by way of discipline', is of the very essence of the teaching of Wisdom."<sup>1</sup>

The parent, or the Wise man, who was responsible for the development of the child's mind, could not regard as out of his province the training of the child's character, for both were indissolubly connected.

Again, in stressing the moral aspect of punishment, the Wise were making a valuable contribution alike to educational and religious thought. The physical force which an irate parent expends in belabouring a troublesome child may be an expression of nothing more than the selfish and vindictive anger of the parent at having his ease or comfort destroyed. Or it may be the manifestation of a slightly higher idea in the parent's mind,

the thought that the child has broken a standard laid down by convention or the moral sense of the community, and that he must be made to suffer the equivalent - as far as possible - for the wrong that he has done. The temper of mind, however, that lies behind punishment both of the vindictive and retributive kind, is of an immature and undeveloped type, and until this primitive form of punishment gives way to a higher, the way of advance to a noble conception of Divine and human fatherhood is effectively blocked.

---

1. Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament. W.T. Davison. p.167

It is by no means one of the least of the merits of the book of Proverbs, that with the earlier conception of human punishment, it will have nothing to do. Punishment is no longer regarded as a means of affording relief to the feelings of the injured, or as a method of making the guilty suffer the equivalent of the suffering he has inflicted on others. With sturdy reiteration the Wise affirm that punishment is given for the sake of the one who has done wrong. "Stripes that wound cleanse away evil."<sup>1</sup> Punishment has no longer its eyes fixed on a foul and loathesome past; its gaze is turned to the future.<sup>2</sup> "Chasten thy son, seeing there is hope."

"Correct thy son, and he shall give thee rest;  
Yea, he shall give delight unto thy soul."<sup>3</sup>

Punishment is now seen to be no isolated physical fact, given, finished with, and forgotten. Rather is it regarded as a moral activity, that makes heavy demands on the parent's very spirit, but that is creative and lasting in its effects. Most significant of all, punishment is discovered to have love at its heart. The harshness of, "He that spareth his rod hateth his son", is followed by the tenderness of, "He that loveth him chasteneth him betimes".<sup>4</sup>

1. Prov. 20,30a. "The proverb..means, first at least, not the wounds which God inflicts, but those which human educational energy inflicts:..stern discipline leads to the rubbing off of evil." Commentary. Delitzsch. p.61, Vol.2.

2. 19,18a.

3. 29,17. Moffatt brings out clearly the forward looking reference - "Chastise your son, and have an easy mind: he will delight your soul."

This truth is both so revolutionary in its influence, and so suggestive in its implications, that it is little wonder if the Wise do not always see its full bearings.<sup>1</sup> What is remarkable is the clarity with which they see its significance for the home and the training of the child. Since their point of view on the matter is expressed, not in recondite theories nor soaring flights of eloquence, but in short aphorisms that have about them something of the force and pungency of the proverbs of the people, there would be all the greater likelihood, one might infer, of the truths they adumbrated, being worked out in actual practice in the Jewish home.

If the sages have a deep interest in the training of children, they are still more interested in the stage that follows on childhood, and in the education of those who stand on the threshold of manhood. Much of the book was written with the needs of young men specially in mind. The didactic note is very obvious in such sections as the first nine chapters, and from ch.22,v.16 to ch. 24. Sometimes the teaching is directed to one youth only, who is called 'my son',<sup>2</sup> and sometimes it is

1. See p. 130 of thesis.

2. 1,v.8,10,15; 2,1; 3,v.1,11,21; 24,10 and 20.  
In his note on 1,8 with its 'my son', Oesterley points out that the words form the usual mode of address of the Wise man to a pupil. Alike in the Babylonian Book of Proverbs, the Words of Achikar, and the Egyptian Wisdom book, the Proverbs of Anii, it is a common formula. p.6. Commentary.

addressed rather to a group of disciples, who are affectionately called 'children'.<sup>1</sup> Since the deepest and most difficult section of Proverbs - the introductory chapters - was composed specifically for youth, one would be justified in thinking that the young men of those far-off times were by no means lacking in mental, moral, and spiritual fibre.

The youth that can rise high, however, can also sink very low, and often it is comparatively small matters that prove a man's undoing. Of laziness, for example, the earlier sages had much to say. "The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing."<sup>2</sup>

"He also that is slack in his work  
Is brother to him that is a destroyer." 3

Have the fertile imagination, the rationalizing fecundity of the slothful man ever been more neatly pictured than in this:-

"The sluggard saith, There is a lion without;  
I shall be murdered in the streets." 4

If people require to be warned of the dangers of laziness, still greater are the perils of an inordinate affection for sleep.

"Love not sleep, lest thou come to poverty." 5

1. 4,1. Oesterley considers that 'children' gives the sense better than 'my sons'.

2. 13,4a.

3. 18,9.

4. <sup>13</sup>22,13. A very similar picture is also given in 26,13. For other references to laziness, see 10,5; 15,19a; 19,15; 20,4; 24,30-32. 21,25.



"How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard?  
 When wilt thou arise out of thy sleep?  
 Yet a little sleep, a little slumber,  
 A little folding of the hands to sleep:  
 So shall thy poverty come as a robber,  
 And thy want as an armed man." 1

If a man is to gain the mastery of life, he must be a master of himself in little things as in great. To greed he must give no countenance.

"When you are sitting at a ruler's table,  
 be careful how you eat,  
 control yourself,  
 if you have a large appetite." 2

Nor must he have anything to do with those who drink to excess.

"Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions?  
 Who hath complaining? who hath wounds without cause?  
 Who hath redness of eyes?  
 They that tarry long at the wine;  
 They that go out to seek mixed wine.  
 Look not upon the wine when it is red,  
 When it giveth its colour in the cup,  
 When it goeth down smoothly:  
 At the last it biteth like a serpent,  
 And stingeth like an adder." 3

As the sages took seriously the ethics of the home and the conduct of its inhabitants, so they had wise and penetrating things to say of friends and friendship. Their references to the subject are comparatively few in number, but they are remarkable for their insight. The Wise suggest that the tie that binds friend to friend is more closely knit than

1. 6,10 and 11, and 24,33 and 34 for very similar words. The third and fourth lines are obviously the reply of the sluggard.
2. 23,1 and 2 (Moffatt's trans.) See also 25,16 for blunt counsel on the same matter.
3. 23,29-32. See also 20,1; 23,20-21.

the bond that binds brothers by birth. "There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother."<sup>1</sup> The love of which the sages never speak in connection with husband and wife, they introduce naturally and frankly into the subject of friendship. "A friend", they say, "loveth at all times."<sup>2</sup> Yet despite the strength of the ties that bind together friend and friend, there is at the same time a certain fragility about them, which, under careless handling, may easily lead to their undoing. "He that harpeth on a matter separateth chief friends"<sup>3</sup>, and so does the man who whispers or insinuates that which he dare not say aloud. If, however, this danger be avoided, and the friendship prove stronger than the calumnies of foolish or malicious men, the two friends may perform for one another a creative service that no others could do. Mental and moral stimulus will come from their mutual contact -

"Iron sharpeneth iron;  
So a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.

Criticism will be given and received - even when it hurts.

"Faithful are the wounds of a friend."<sup>5</sup> But if, in the interests of a greater end, salutary pain were administered and accepted, nevertheless the outstanding mark of friendship was not its discipline but its joy. What perfume was to the senses, the sweetness

1. 18,24b.  $\text{אָהַב}$  literally means 'lover'.

2. 17,17.

3. 16,28.

4. 27,17

5. 27,6. 'Friend' literally is 'lover'.

of a friend was to a man's heart.<sup>1</sup> If the beautiful words -

"As in water face answereth to face,  
So the heart of man to man" 2 -

be taken as applying to the unity of spirit that characterizes true friends,<sup>3</sup> no simpler and nobler expression could be found of the significance of friendship.

When the Wise turn from the consideration of a man's private life with wife and child and friend, to the larger world of business, their point of view gains in width and loses in consistency. They had a clear, logical conception of how a man ought to comport himself within the walls of his home, but when they consider him in his public life, their point of view reflects the multiple standards which then, as now, strove for men's allegiance. Twice the proverb is repeated that "The rich man's wealth is his strong city"<sup>4</sup> - as if wealth were the one thing that mattered. Money is shown to bring not only power and security but friends as well<sup>5</sup> - a point of view that is rendered more

1. 27,9. "Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart: So doth the sweetness of a man's friend that cometh of hearty counsel." The exact significance of the second clause is not at all clear in the Hebrew, but it has certainly some fragrant reference to friendship.
2. 27,19.
3. A possible interpretation, whose likelihood is enhanced by its nearness to v.17, and the way in which the thought of friendship recurs in the chapter.
4. 10,15a, and 18,11a.
5. 14,20b. "The rich hath many friends" (Lit. 'But the lovers of the rich (man are) many' - Oesterley, p. 112) and 19,4 - "Wealth addeth many friends".

sinister by the emphasis laid on its converse. "The poor is hated even of his own neighbour".<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, the Wise<sup>2</sup> were certain that ill-gotten gains were<sup>of</sup> no advantage, and honest poverty they believed to be better than the wealth of the dishonest man.<sup>3</sup> They had seen enough of the vicissitudes of the economic world to know that riches had wings.<sup>4</sup> It was foolish, therefore, to toil for wealth. "Weary not thyself to be rich",<sup>5</sup> they said. True wealth consisted not in money or goods, but in man's innermost soul, in that spirit of contentment which enabled its owner to be serene and at peace, whatever the outward circumstances of his life: "There is that maketh himself poor, yet hath great wealth."<sup>6</sup>

Although the greater part of Proverbs is pre-eminently a book for the people, it is, nevertheless, deeply interested in

1. 14,20a - and 19,4, which Moffatt with poignant simplicity translates "A poor man's only friend will leave him". 19,7 treats of the same idea, "All the brethren of the poor do hate him: How much more do his friends go far from him."
2. 10,2 - "Treasures of wickedness profit nothing." So, similarly, 11,4.
3. 28,6. "Better is the poor that walketh in his integrity, Than he that is perverse in his ways, though he be rich."
4. 23,5. "Wilt thou set thine eyes upon it? it is gone (margin R.V.) For riches certainly make themselves wings, Like an eagle that flieth toward heaven."
5. 23,4a.
6. "There is that maketh itself poor, yet hath great wealth." While this proverb can have the interpretation given above, a much less flattering rendering is also possible - "There is that feigneth himself to be poor, yet hath great wealth."

the question of the kingship. That the king was a vital force in Jewish life is evidenced by the number of proverbs about him. Apparently the estimation in which he was held varied with the centuries. In the earlier 'Solomonic' collection of proverbs (10,- 22,v.16), he is held in higher esteem than is apparent in the later collection of 'Hezekiah', (25-29).<sup>1</sup> In the earlier section, his rectitude is shown in the way he approves the good and condemns the bad.<sup>2</sup> He can do no wrong, since he is the mouthpiece of God - "A divine sentence is in the lips of the king". His infallibility, however, is relative, not absolute. Such wisdom and power as he has are derived from God.

"The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord as the water-courses:

He turneth it whithersoever he will." 4

But it is not the monarchy that gives lustre to the people, but that on which the monarchy is based and for which it exists, namely, righteousness. It is righteousness that exalteth a nation.<sup>5</sup> In the Hezekiah collection, the point of view has decidedly altered. "The king is still looked up to with awe; the book begins with a group of four sentences on the true glory of a monarch, followed by two on the right behaviour for a

1. This thought is worked out by Cheyne in 'Job and Solomon', pp. 136,137,145.

2. 14,35; 16,13; 20,8 and 26.

3. 16,10

4. 21,1

5. 14,34a; also 20,28.

subject (25,2-7). The king is described (surely with a touch of idealism) as inquisitive in the best sense; his 'heart', or understanding, is unsearchable. But this happy view of monarchy passes away. There are several proverbs complaining of the wickedness of kings, which are almost without a parallel in the earlier collection. Ungodly rulers have made the people 'sigh' (29,2); they have been like 'roaring lions and ravenous bears' to the 'poor folk' (28,15 and 16), and have completely destroyed the freedom of social intercourse (28,12 and 28)."<sup>1</sup>

With regard to the number and type of subjects with which it deals, the book of Proverbs is a strange one, ranging as it does from the loftiest counsels regarding the treatment of an enemy<sup>2</sup> to the refinements of table manners;<sup>3</sup> from shrewd remarks about the efficacy of bribes<sup>4</sup> to a classic statement on the value of self-mastery;<sup>5</sup> from words that show a thoughtful consideration for the weakest members of the community<sup>6</sup> to a slashing attack on kings who misuse their power.<sup>7</sup> Yet despite the diversity of outlook and subject-matter, there is an

1. Job and Solomon. F.X.Cheyne. p. 145.

2. 25,21a. "If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat."

3. 23,1-3. Verses 1 and 2 are quoted on p. 115.

4. 17,23; 21,14. "A gift in secret pacifieth anger."

5. 16,32. "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; And he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city." According to the Cent. Proverbs, p.105, "The Jewish fathers cited this text as the definition of the perfect hero."

6. 23,10. "Remove not the landmark of the widow" (rather than 'ancient landmark') And enter not into the fields of the fatherless."

7. 29,15.

underlying unity. "As with a complicated piece of music through the intricacies of the notes runs ever an underlying theme, so here through the medley of disparate sayings can be heard the preaching of one great thought - "Wisdom".... These Jewish proverbs were not gathered haphazard, nor simply as a collection of Jewish proverbs; but for the express purpose of illustrating, developing, and enforcing the conception of Wisdom."<sup>1</sup>

---

1. Studies in Life from Jewish Proverbs. W.A.L. Elmslie, p.33.

The Teaching of Proverbs.

B.

On God

and

On Wisdom, Human and Divine.

Before one attempts to set forth the teaching of the Wise on God and on Wisdom, it is well to recall one factor in the religious heritage of their day. The contents of the J and E documents would be known to the Wise men, and the stirring words of Amos, Hosea, and Isaiah would have made their mark on some at least of the sages. The early folk-tales of the nation and the brave sayings of the prophets had one marked characteristic in common - a vivid consciousness of the intervention and the direct action of God. Tradition told how the whole course of Abraham's life in Haran had been altered by the command of the Almighty when He said, "Get thee out of thy country..unto the land that I will shew thee."<sup>1</sup> So was the whole tenor of Amos' life changed when the Lord took him from following the flock, and said, "Go, prophecy".<sup>2</sup> The motif of the book of Genesis, "And God said", appears again in the stories of Samuel, David and Elijah, and

---

1. Gen. 12,1

2. Amos, 7,15.



shows itself at work in the lives of the eighth century prophets.

With the passing of time, there came a change not only in the physical setting of life but also in its inner spirit. The days of incessant wandering and wars of conquest were long over. A settled order of society took the place of the dangerous life of tribes on the march for land. The pleasures of wealth and luxury were discovered and enjoyed.<sup>1</sup> A life of ordered security does not make so obviously for dependence on God and sensitiveness to His voice as do more precarious and dangerous times. God might and did speak directly to men of the calibre of Amos, Hosea and Isaiah, but what message had He for the farmer, absorbed in the care of his land, or for the merchant, engrossed in the pursuit of riches? Moreover, with the passing of time, the voice of prophecy was heard less frequently, and to thoughtful men - such, for example, as the writer of the first nine chapters of Proverbs - the question may well have consciously presented itself as to how God was going to manifest His will to the new age. Was the Lord's hand shortened that it could not save? Were His lips no longer to convey messages to men? Questions such as these must have seemed almost blasphemous to those who had been brought up in the belief in a living, active God, Who with directness and force made His will known in the temporal world; yet the increasing complexity

---

1. e.g. in the time of Solomon and of Jeroboam. A vivid picture is given in Amos of the ostentatious wealth and luxury of the society of his day.

of life and the widening range of their experience, must have made the question of the method of God's revelation a greater difficulty to the religious men of later days than it was to the simpler, childlike faith of an earlier time.

It was with a problem such as this that the religious mind, sooner or later, had to grapple. The Wise, consciously or unconsciously had to face it, and in the book of Proverbs they gave their answer. The Lord was still with His people; He was, as of yore, conveying His will to men, but that will was made known, not as in ancient times in one main way by a direct fiat sounding in the heart of some exceptional man, but rather was He manifesting His mind and purpose in innumerable different ways, in the domestic skill of a woman, in the wise training of children, in the lefty business standards of the merchant, in the equitable administration of justice by the king. "The spirit of man is the lamp of the Lord."<sup>1</sup> The isolated lights that had flamed up so bravely from the stories of Abraham and Joseph, Moses and Samuel, were now succeeded by the steady, mellow glow produced by innumerable little lights burning in home and street, in farm and field.

The Hebrews were essentially practical in their religion. When God spoke to the patriarchs and judges, the kings and the prophets, He revealed Himself to them, not for the mystical illumination of their hearts, but in order that something might be done, some course of action set on foot. The sages inherited

---

1. 20, 27a.

this tradition. "Through wisdom is an house builded."<sup>1</sup> By its means kings and princes carried on the work<sup>2</sup> of judgment, and the seductions of evil were kept at a distance.<sup>3</sup> Through wisdom men were enabled to walk in the paths of good.<sup>4</sup> Wisdom was bound up with action, & above all with righteous action. "The chief domain .. of wisdom is that of practical ethics.. For the Jews wisdom and practical religion were substantially one."<sup>5</sup> In this close correlation of religion and ethics, there are surely traces of the strong ethical note struck by the eighth century prophets. The intimate connection that subsisted in the minds of the Wise between right thinking and right living reminds one also of the point of view of the sages of China. In this respect Chinese and Semite are curiously alike, both being in the practical nature of their thinking, markedly different from the more theoretical and intellectualistic Indian and Greek mind.

With this practical bias, however, there is no ignoring of the intellectual side of life in the Wisdom literature of the Hebrews, as the book of Proverbs makes plain. The first few verses, with their exposition of the aim of the whole book, give obvious proof of this.

1. 24,3a.

2. 8,15.

3. 2,10-20; 6,23-24.

4. 2,1-8.

5. The Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament. W.T. Davison. p.11.

"To know wisdom and instruction;  
 To discern the words of understanding;  
 To receive instruction in wise dealing,  
 In righteousness and judgement and equity;  
 To give subtilty to the simple,  
 To the young man knowledge and discretion:  
 That the wise man may hear, and increase in learning;  
 And that the man of understanding may attain unto sound  
     counsels:  
 To understand a proverb, and a figure;  
 The words of the wise, and their dark sayings." 1

"It is a very old complaint", says Davison, "that the man of intellect is not religious as he should be, and that the 'pious' man is apt to be weak in the head. Reason is opposed to revelation, and revelation is supposed to be subversive of reason. It is the strong feature of the literature we are now examining, that it will not hear of this mischievous divorce between constituent parts of man's nature. For the writers of Proverbs, religion means good sense, religion means mastery of affairs, religion means strength and manliness and success, religion means a well-furnished intellect employing the best means to accomplish the highest ends." <sup>2</sup> In other words, God taught a man not only to act rightly and nobly but also to think clearly and well.

From this preliminary survey, one can pass to an

1. 1,2-6. The R.V. is not very successful in bringing out the connection between the title and the aim of the book - curious in view of the fact that the connection is clear enough in the Hebrew. Moffatt translates it thus - "Maxims...for gaining sagacity and intelligence, for a grasp of wise teaching, for training in right conduct, in duty, goodness and integrity, for imparting insight to the ignorant, knowledge and sense to the young, for understanding maxims and parables, the sentences of sages and their aphorisms." (v.'s 2,4,6.)
2. The Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament. p. 134.

examination of the detailed teaching of the book of Proverbs on the great subject of God. The Wise did not set themselves to give a formal and systematic demonstration of God's nature or of His activities, but incidentally they say a great deal about Him. There is the closest connection between God and Wisdom.<sup>1</sup> As reason and understanding play a vital part in the spiritual life of man, so is Wisdom an integral part of Godhead. The omniscient mind of God is seen in the universe which He has made, a universe which is the product, not of mere arbitrary omnipotence, but of wise, creative thought.

"The Lord by wisdom founded the earth;  
By understanding he established the heavens."<sup>2</sup>

The eternal mind which brought the vastness of the universe into being is also the creator of that puny creature, man<sup>3</sup> - yes, and of the minutiae of his physical being -

"The hearing ear, and the seeing eye,  
The Lord hath made even both of them."<sup>4</sup>

The Lord who knows the inmost mysteries of wind and water, sea and sky, the heavens above and the hidden abodes of the dead beneath, knows still more the secret places of men's hearts -

1. 21,30. "There is no wisdom nor understanding, Nor counsel against the Lord" - why? Because all wisdom is from and of God.
2. 3,19. Also 3,20 - "By his knowledge the depths were broken up, And the skies drop down dew."
3. 22,2b. "The Lord is the maker of them all."
4. 20,12.

"Sheol and Abaddon are before the Lord:  
How much more then the hearts of the children of men." <sup>1</sup>

The omniscience and omnipotence displayed by God are shown, not simply because God in His being is omnipotent and omniscient, but for a great end and purpose. God is righteous, and He would have His world righteous too. As the Wisdom that is a vital part of the Godhead is the pivot on which the world is established, and is at the same time God's gift to mankind, <sup>2</sup> so is it with His righteousness. It is the eternal factor that controls the life of the world, and he that walks in the way of righteousness finds himself living in harmony with the laws that govern the world. Why are the eyes of God in every place? Because He is keeping watch upon the evil and the good. <sup>3</sup> Why are the inmost secrets of every heart known by God? Because He is Judge, eternal Arbiter of right and wrong, and perfect judgment requires perfect knowledge.

"All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes:  
But the Lord weigheth the spirits." <sup>4</sup>

"A man's judgement cometh from the Lord." <sup>5</sup>

Behind the Divine judgment there is not only omniscience, there is the fire of Divine love and hate -

1. 15,11.

2. 2,6. "For the Lord giveth wisdom; Out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding."

3. 15,3.

4. 16,2.

5. 29,26b.

"There be six things which the Lord hateth;  
 Yea, seven which are an abomination unto him:  
 Haughty eyes, a lying tongue,  
 And hands that shed innocent blood;  
 An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations,  
 Feet that be swift in running to mischief;  
 A false witness that uttereth lies,  
 And he that soweth discord among brethren." 1

If there be six things which the Lord hates, the objects to which His love goes forth can be summed up in one simple category - "He loveth him that followeth after righteousness." 2

In the Divine Being there is not only wisdom and righteousness; there is also love. The power that brought the world into being is at the disposal of the defenceless widow 3 and the friendless poor. God himself will plead their cause. 4 The thought of God's love is not emphasised in Proverbs. The writers do not dare to call Him 'Father'. They are content to speak of Him as man's maker, 5 man's confidence 6 and shield 7, his redeemer or next-of-kin. 8 In two noteworthy verses in the introduction,

---

1. 6,16-19.

2. 15,9b.

3. 15,25b. "He will establish the border of the widow."

4. 22,22 and 23a. "Rob not the poor, because he is poor, Neither oppress the afflicted in the gate: For the Lord will plead their cause."

5. 22,2b.

6. 3,26. "The Lord shall be thy confidence."

7. 30,5b. "He is a shield unto them that trust in him."

8. 23,11a. "Their redeemer is strong." - i.e. the fatherless.  
 "The Hebrew word 'gō'ēl' is the technical one for the next of kin who was bound by law to redeem his kinsman's land."

however, a thought is suggested which, when taken in the context of the book as a whole, come very near the conception of God as a Father.

"My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord;  
Neither be weary of his reproof:  
For whom the Lord loveth he reproveth;  
Even as a father the son in whom he delighteth." 1

In the days when human punishment was conceived as little more than an opportunity for expressing the vindictive or retributive anger of the person wronged, it was inevitable that divine anger should be construed in similar terms. By the time that the main collections of proverbs had been compiled, a great advance had been made in regard to the meaning of punishment. When administered by a wise father, it was seen to have the richest educative and moral value, and to have love at its heart.<sup>2</sup> As, in later days, the writer of the introduction to the whole book pens his words, he rises to the further thought of connecting punishment of this costing and creative type with God Himself. There is only a hairbreadth between this position and the final one to be attained, that it is only a father who can thus love and punish, and that the chastening and reproof that come from above are given by none

1. 3,11 and 12.

2. See pages 111. 112 of thesis.



other than a Father God.<sup>1,2.</sup>

The link that joins Proverbs together from its homely saws of practical life to its deep, wise teaching about God is the thought of Wisdom. What is it, this stupendous but elusive conception? In part, the question has already been answered. Wisdom is a vital part of the Godhead, which finds expression in the perfection and multiplicity of the Divine handiwork, in the vastness of the universe and the life of man. In expressing this point of view in Proverbs, the Wise are simply giving richer content to what was already a cardinal belief in Hebrew thought. They take, however, a further step. It is possible to abstract this one characteristic<sup>3</sup> of God, and concentrate on it, until it becomes no longer the wisdom of God but Wisdom itself. This is the step which is taken in the first nine chapters of Proverbs, and particularly in chapter eight. Describing the rationale of the process, A.B. Davidson writes, "The world being a unity,

1. The Hebrew text of the fourth line of the above tetrastich is awkward. "Even as a father" causes the translator much difficulty. But even if the words be disallowed, the fact remains that Proverbs emphasises the close connection between fatherhood and a noble view of punishment, and the emphasis on the latter in v.11 and 12a will tend to lead to the thought of God as a father.
2. It is impossible to note all the aspects of God that are mentioned. Only a few in addition to the three main ones touched on can be specified - His omnipresence, 15,3; supremacy, 16,33, and 19,21; mystery, 20,24 and 25,2 and 30,1-4; a rewarder of conduct 24,12 and 10,22.
3. It must be remembered that Wisdom (whether Divine or human) has to the Hebrew mind a wider significance than the English word suggests. It has a moral aspect as well as an intellectual.

animated by Divine principles, of which all its phenomena are embodiments, these principles may be regarded as an articulated organized whole, outside of God Himself, the expression of His mind, but having an existence of its own alongside of God. The unity of thought and efficiency that animates and operates the world may be abstracted from God, the actual living Operator. Thus there arises the conception of an idea of the Universe or world-plan which however is not a mere thought or purpose, but an efficiency as well. On account of the powerful efficiency of God, this plan or organism of principles, which is the expression of God's mind and power, may be idealized, and regarded as animated and active, and have consciousness attributed to it; and, being a thing of which God Himself is conscious, seeing He does not work blindly, but sets before His own mind what He does, it may become the Fellow of God."<sup>1</sup> Thus the philosopher expresses it. The poet puts it differently. He might say that as he was thinking of Wisdom, his imagination caught fire, and this was how he conceived of her -

"The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way,  
 Before his works of old.  
 I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning,  
 Or ever the earth was.  
 When there were no depths, I was brought forth;  
 When there were no fountains abounding with water.  
 Before the mountains were settled,  
 Before the hills was I brought forth;  
 While as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields,  
 Nor the beginning of the dust of the world.

---

1. Biblical and Literary Essays. A.E. Davidson. pp.33,34.

When he established the heavens, I was there:  
 When he set a circle upon the face of the deep:  
 When he made firm the skies above:  
 When the fountains of the deep became strong:  
 When he gave to the sea its bound,  
 That the waters should not transgress his commandment:  
 When he marked out the foundations of the earth:  
 Then I was by him, as a master workman:  
 And I was daily his delight,  
 Rejoicing always before him;  
 Rejoicing in his habitable earth;  
 And my delight was with the sons of men." (8,22-31.)

Behind the images of the poet, can one discern their meaning?  
 Cheyne's comment on the passage is illuminating. "Wisdom is now  
 presented to us, in the familiar dialect of poetry, as the first-  
 born Child of the Creator. There is but one Wisdom; though her  
 forms are many, in her origin she is one. The Wisdom who pre-  
 sided over the 'birth' of nature is the same who by her messengers  
 (the 'wise men') calls mankind to turn aside from evil (9,3).  
 There can therefore be no real disharmony between nature and  
 morality; the picture leaves no room for an Ahriman, in this and  
 other respects resembling the Cosmogony in Genesis 1.... There is  
 also no time when we can say that 'Wisdom was not'. Faith de-  
 clares that even in that primitive Chaos of which our reason has  
 a horror, divine Wisdom reigned supreme. The heavenly ocean,  
 the ancient hills....all these were later works of God than the  
 Architect through whom He made them. And how did the Architect  
 work? By a 'divine improvisation' which allowed no sense of  
 effort or fatigue, and which still continues with unabated  
 freshness. But though her sportive path can still be traced

in the processes of nature, her highest delight is in the regeneration of the moral life of humanity."<sup>1</sup>

There was a time when men would have ~~geded~~ to other god a place on God's throne. These were the days when clear-sighted souls spoke of God as a jealous God, and when with scathing words they denounced graven images and false gods. But when the writer of the introduction to Proverbs wrote his inspired contribution, the transcendant uniqueness of God had been so securely established that there was no longer a danger of His exalted pre-eminence being taken from Him. The figure of Wisdom, His child, could with safety be exalted to a seat in the heavenly places. In this, there is something more than poetry. "The personification of Wisdom may have been poetical in origin, but is on the verge of becoming a philosophical doctrine."<sup>2</sup>

The range of Wisdom's being and activity is remarkable. "Set up from everlasting, from the beginning", she yet finds her delight with the sons of men. Present when the foundations of the earth were marked out, she now cries out words of simple counsel in the city street. Rejoicing always before the Lord, she enters the lowly dwelling of man's heart. She is both transcendent and immanent, at home with God and man.

1. Job and Solomon. T.K. Cheyne. pp. 159-160.

2. Hebrew Religion, Its Origin and Development. W.O.E. Oesterley and T.H. Robinson. p. 339. In the original quotation the sentence is a long one, and is begun in a way that necessitates the insertion of 'which' after 'wisdom'.

In this, as in the emphasis placed on the rational side of man's life, there are doubtless traces of Greek thought and influence. The link has begun to be forged which in later days will help to make possible a rapprochement of Hebraic and Hellenistic thought. If, in certain respects, Greek influence can be discerned in Proverbs, in other ways the whole temper of the book is different. One difference can be summarily expressed by saying, as Davison does, that whereas to Socrates knowledge was virtue, to Solomon virtue was knowledge.<sup>1</sup> To the Hebrew mind the triumphs of the righteous will come before the achievements of the intellect. A much deeper difference, however, is to be seen in the place that God assumed in their respective thinking. "The method of Greece was to proceed from God to life. The axioms of the one are the conclusions of the other."<sup>2</sup> Or, as A.B. Davidson puts it, "The Hebrew philosopher never ascended from nature or life to God; he always came down from God upon life."<sup>3</sup> This is very true of the book of Proverbs. The life of which it treats is the life not of saint or prophet or hero, but of the average man, busy with the simple, wholesome interests of everyday life. Yet that ordinary, homely life is linked with the eternal things. The light that

---

1. The Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament. p.12.

2. Bishop Westcott (Dict. of Bible. vol.2,p.850, new edit.)  
quoted by Davison in above book, p.12.

3. Biblical and Literary Essays. A.B. Davidson. p.31.

shines on it comes from God Himself. His name may be mentioned with no great frequency, but He is the beginning and end of it all.

"The name of the Lord is a strong tower:  
The righteous runneth into it, and is safe." 1

This is the assured confidence of the whole book.

---

1. 18,10.

CHAPTER 4.

A CRITICAL APPRECIATION OF THE  
BOOK OF PROVERBS.

---

## CHAPTER 4.

---

### A CRITICAL APPRECIATION OF THE BOOK OF PROVERBS.

---

In the last chapter some account was given of the teaching of the book of Proverbs. The attempt must now be made to assess its value. What are its weak points? Wherein is it strong? Is undue emphasis placed on any subjects? Or are any great tracts of life and experience passed over in silence?

The last question provides a convenient starting-place. Before entering, however, on the subject of omissions in the teaching of Proverbs, one must keep three points in mind. The limitations of the 'argument from silence' should be remembered. The fact that a subject is not discussed by certain writers does not necessarily mean that it has no significance for them. It conceivably may mean the opposite; it may point to the unconscious held that the subject has on their life and the life of their time. A point of view, a type of thought may be so integrated with the intellectual climate of the day, that it is taken for granted and unnoticed, like the physical atmosphere. Because it is held and believed by all, it may be referred to by none. Again, one must remember the necessary limitations which a book's origin and setting impose on its author: ideas which



have not yet risen above the general horizon of the time cannot be expected to show themselves in the literature of the period. Finally, and passing from the general to the particular, one does well constantly to remind oneself of the raw material of which the book of Proverbs is composed. Its basis rests on the homely sayings of the people. A collection of proverbs by its very nature reflects the point of view of the average person, and not the exalted ideas of the man of genius, be he philosopher or poet, prophet or psalmist. Because of its subject-matter, therefore, Proverbs is essentially one with the rock from which it is hewn, and cannot with justice be accused of limitations that are inherent in its constitution.

Speaking of the gaps and omissions in the teaching of the book, Tey cites courage, fortitude, moderation in thought, self-sacrifice, intellectual truthfulness and beauty as virtues that receive no mention.<sup>1</sup> Of these, beauty belongs to an aesthetic class by itself; moderation in thought and intellectual truthfulness can be classified together, since both emphasise factors of special significance for the world of thought; courage, fortitude and self-sacrifice can be grouped under one heading, since they have a certain affinity. Is it possible to discover

---

1. The Book of Proverbs. (International Critical Commentary). Crawford H. Tey. p. 13 (Introduction).

Of the six virtues omitted by Proverbs, Aristotle explicitly mentions two in his list of cardinal virtues in the Nicomachean Ethics - courage  $\alpha\upsilon\delta\omicron\pi\epsilon\iota\alpha$  and truthfulness  $\alpha\lambda\eta\theta\epsilon\iota\alpha$ . Moderation of thought was a *sine qua non* for the Greek mind.

any satisfactory reason why these different types of virtues are passed over in silence in Proverbs ?

With regard to its reticence on the subject of beauty, a certain defence might be offered. Considering that Proverbs is to a large extent a popular handbook on ethics, its compilers should be congratulated rather than reproached for keeping to the subject under discussion, and not introducing interesting but irrelevant material. Such a line of argument has a certain validity, but it rings truer to the departmentalizing point of view of the twentieth century than to the comprehensive attitude of the ancient world, which viewed life as a whole, and refused to divide experience into water-tight compartments, labelled religious or moral or aesthetic. In view of that wholesome unitary tendency in ancient thought, it might be argued with equal plausibility that the Wise were gravely at fault in saying so little about what formed so vital a part of the complete life. A stronger defence could be made on the grounds that, although the writers of Proverbs said nothing of beauty per se, certain of their sayings bear witness to the fact that they had the artist's and the poet's love of beauty. Vignettes such as these could not have been painted by men devoid of the Nature-lover's observant eye, or the poet's faculty for translating visual impressions into musical words -

"But the path of the righteous is as the light of the dawn,  
That shineth more and more unto the perfect day". 1

---

1. 4, 18. 'The light of the dawn' is given in the R.V. margin;  
'the shining light' is the translation given in the text.

"The hay is carried, and the tender grass sheweth itself,  
And the herbs of the mountains are gathered in". 1

"As the sparrow in her wandering, as the swallow in her flying,  
So the course that is causeless lighteth not". 2

The mind, moreover, that could conceive of Wisdom as is done in chapter eight, and could describe her in words of such dignity and power was a mind instinct with the sense of beauty. While that line of defence has a certain validity, it must be frankly admitted that in this matter the Wise were children of their race. The Hebrews as a people were not insensitive to the beauty of visible objects, but what called forth their deepest enthusiasm was not the transitory glory of sky or flower or the handiwork of man, but the eternal beauty of holiness.

With regard to the silence of Proverbs on the virtues of moderation in thought and intellectual truthfulness, the task of defence is an easier matter. Moderation in thought represents a second stage in the education of man. Before the art of seeing two sides of a question is acquired, there must first be presented two sides to see. It is one of the pre-eminent contributions of Hebrew thought that it gave to a world, uncertain and confused in its thinking about the unseen, a dominant and sure belief in the reality and power of God. The subsidiary, though not unimportant, question of the significance of the seen, and of the relationship between the world of time and the world of eternity might with safety be left to later generations to discuss. As for intellectual

---

1. 27, 25.  
2. 26, 2.

truthfulness, one cannot enter into the question of Proverbs' neglect of the subject, until one knows exactly what is meant by the term. Does Toy mean by it a virtue that is peculiar to students and men of intellect? If that is his meaning, it were easy to point out that the book as a whole was not written with these specifically in mind, but seems rather to be orientated round the needs and interests of the average man. Even those sections of Proverbs which have a pronounced pedagogical flavour<sup>1</sup> are not addressed<sup>ed</sup> to students as students, but to young men who are facing all the manifold interests, responsibilities and temptations of life. Moreover, Toy himself points out that intellectual truthfulness "belongs to a mode of thought which was foreign to the Jewish mind".<sup>2</sup> Since that is so, the compilers of Proverbs can hardly be blamed for their silence on the subject. Even if they said remarkably little on truthfulness, intellectual or otherwise, they were, by their insistence on the God Who trieth the heart, going to the root of the matter. Their emphasis on the all-seeing God would eventually result in consciences that regarded truthfulness as one of the cardinal and basic virtues.

What of the failure to inculcate fortitude, courage and self-sacrifice? The silence on the first of these, fortitude, is understandable and almost inevitable, in view of the theory held at the time with regard to reward and retribution. Since goodness, it was believed, eventually led to good fortune, there was no need

---

1. Ch. 1-9, and from 22, v. 16. ch. 24.

2. The Book of Proverbs. Crawford H. Toy. p.13 (Introduction).

to preach the necessity of fortitude in affliction, since sorrow and suffering were bound to be but temporary. For the lack of emphasis on courage in Proverbs, it is difficult if not impossible to find any excuse. The traditions of Palestine were rich in incidents of courage, and a race that had been nurtured on tales of Moses' fearless challenges to Pharaoh, Nathan's shattering words, "Thou art the man" to David, and Elijah's defiance of the priests of Baal at Carmel - such a race certainly knew the meaning of moral<sup>1</sup> courage. Yet the subject is practically ignored in Proverbs. In view of that fact, the silence of the Wise on the virtue of self-sacrifice is not surprising, since the one is indissolubly connected with the other. Here again there is no excuse. The Hebrews knew what self-sacrifice meant. They had been brought up on the traditional south country stories of Abraham's unselfish dealings with Lot on the matter of land,<sup>2</sup> and of Moses' passionate desire to be blotted out of the book of life, if by such a deed he could still be one with his sinning but loved people;<sup>3</sup> the northern tale of Abraham's costing decision to sacrifice Isaac was known to them. Yet in Proverbs there is no mention of this supreme virtue of the human spirit.

It must be frankly admitted that Proverbs is an exponent of the homely virtues, and not of the supernatural ones. It extols the good qualities of the merchant and the householder; it is

- 
1. The one exception is in 28, 1 - "The wicked flee when no man pursueth: But the righteous are bold as a lion".
  2. Gen. 13, 1-12.
  3. Ex. 32, 30-32.
  4. Gen. 22, 1-19.

silent about the virtues of the prophet and the saint. It should be noted, however, that if the book is silent about courage and self-sacrifice, it is almost as reticent about a number of other vital facts in the moral and religious life - for example, prayer and ceremonial worship. In this latter case, paucity of reference does not mean lack of respect or insufficiency of regard; the same may well hold true of the attitude of the Wise to the heroic virtues. With regard to prayer, very little is said on the subject, yet the few remarks that are made go to the very heart of the matter

"The Lord is far from the wicked:  
But he heareth the prayer of the righteous".<sup>1</sup>

"The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord:  
But the prayer of the upright is his delight".<sup>2</sup>

Nor must one assume that the scarcity of references to worship indicates any lack of sympathy for the cultus. "To suppose", says Oesterley, "that the Chakamim were opponents of the sacrificial system, or of liturgical worship generally, would be a great mistake. They had not the remotest desire to depreciate these, nor do they ever utter a word to this effect; had such a thing ever been suspected by the religious authorities it is certain that our book would never have been admitted into the Canon".<sup>3</sup>

The fact must be remembered that the compilers of Proverbs were essentially practical in their outlook. The peculiar ethos of their faith, enriched by the influence of the eighth century

<sup>1</sup>: 15; 89.

<sup>3</sup>. The Book of Proverbs. W.O.E.Oesterley. p.67 (Introduction).

prophets, had made its mark on them. To the Wise religion was a thing to be lived. Their knowledge of the lives of those whom they were instructing, would make it incumbent on them to express their convictions in categories of thought understandable to their audience, and in ways which could be worked out in life. Along with this belief in the practical character of religion, went something of the illuminating power of genius, which first succeeds in isolating one central fact from a multiplicity of accompanying facts of lesser significance, or from facts which at the moment are irrelevant, and then is successful in directing a flood of concentrated light upon the point at issue. To the compilers of Proverbs the all-important matter to be stressed was the wise conduct of life, and to that major question they gave their full attention.

The Wise were content to leave to others the treatment of questions that turned round the ceremonies of the cultus, or such subjects as were outwith their own special province. It was the responsibility of the priests to lay down and enforce the rules that appertained to acts of ritual worship. That was their task, and it was one which the Wise left unreservedly in their hands. It was the responsibility of the prophets to receive directly from Almighty God His message for the social, political or religious life of their time. They were His ambassadors, now proclaiming in burning words the news of a coming Day of the Lord, now denouncing the sins of the nation, and now laying down great reforming principles to be applied in city and state. The prophets were

important members of society, whose significance the Wise must have much appreciated, although they make little or no mention of them in their writings. Their own rôle was a humbler one.

It was their part to bring religion from the restricted precincts of the altar, or from the wide, sweeping horizons depicted by internationally minded prophets to the humble life of home and farm and street. It was their part to set along side of the religious lyrics of the psalmist the sober, matter-of-fact reflections of practical men as to the meaning of the religious life for the average man. \*The Book of Proverbs, taken as a whole, seems to supply the necessary counterweight to the psalms and the prophecies. The psalmist loves God more than aught else: but must everyone say, 'Possessing this, I have pleasure in nothing upon earth' (Ps.73,25).<sup>1</sup> Would it be good to be always in this mood?" Bringing religion into everyday life, the Wise performed a valuable service in spiritualising and moralising that life. They made it indubitably plain that the religious man was the good man ; this is their great contribution alike to religious and ethical thought. Was that contribution not vitiated, however, by its utilitarianism, and its appeal to self-interest? "Goodness

---

1. Job and Solomon. T. K. Cheyne. pp. 176, 177.



pays", the Wise thought.<sup>1</sup> Does it? And if it does, is it goodness?

It is impossible to answer these questions without considering a subject that at first sight seems remote from them, but which in reality has a close connection, the question of immortality. Old Testament thought on the subject changed and grew with the centuries. It might be said to pass through three stages. First, there was the view, shared by most of the peoples of antiquity, that the dead were not dead, in the sense of being non-existent, -but-that but that their spirits were living, active entities. "Those who had departed were possessed of knowledge and power greater than those of men on this earth."<sup>2</sup> The spirits of the dead were thought of as surrounding, directing, helping, injuring the life of the living. They came and went freely between 'there' and 'here'. Sometimes they were regarded as wise and beneficent, in which case they were spoken of as 'elohim' or gods; sometimes they were thought of as forbidding, sinister beings called 'se'irim'. Whether good or evil, they were considered very real and powerful factors in

1. It is interesting to compare this point of view with that adumbrated in Book 2 of the Republic, where Socrates depicts the good man as stripped of everything, scourged, tortured, fettered, suffering all manner of evils, charged with being a hater of justice, and finally crucified - yet maintaining his justice until death. In comparison with such a picture, the Wise men's conception of the good man is a very poor second. But it must be remembered that Socrates and 'Solomon' were attempting different things, the one to probe to the ultimate meaning and value of goodness, the other to describe the manner of its expression. The one was thinking of the root, the other mainly of the fruit. Nevertheless, one misses the note in Proverbs of disinterested and suffering goodness.
2. Immortality and the Unseen World. W.O.E. Oesterley. pp. 202, 203.

the life of the living.

With the passing of time, and as the conception held of God grew in power and depth, it was realized that beliefs such as these were incompatible with the thought of an all-righteous, all-powerful God. The spirits, therefore, must be dethroned. "The departed, so it was taught, do not remain on earth, nor do they hover in or around the graves where their bodies lie; but they go at once to the dark, silent underworld, and from that city of the dead they are unable ever to emerge again. They have neither parts nor passions, they are the mere shades of what they once were ....Jahwe has nothing to do with the departed in Sheol; His interest is in living men, not in the dead who cannot worship Him".<sup>1</sup> The dead were - metaphorically speaking - dishonoured, in order that Jahveh might be honoured. He was to be all in all, and His glory could best be seen if the attention of the living were withdrawn from the shadowy realms of the dead to the certain light of the living Lord. If this interpretation of a certain stage in Old Testament thought be accepted, it would look as if the very paucity of references in its literature to the afterlife (in contrast with the teaching of Egypt)<sup>2</sup> was full of significance.

Finally there came a time when the unique pre-eminence of of Jahveh was assured, and when the danger was completely past of His place being taken by any rival. It was then possible to teach

- 
1. Immortality and the Unseen World. W.O.E.Oesterley. p. 203.
  2. For the thought in this and the preceding paragraph the writer is indebted to Oesterley in the above book, p.190-222.

a positive, rich doctrine of the immortality of the soul. The prophet might envisage the dead as being raised up to a new life on earth in the completed Kingdom of God; the psalmist, on the other hand, was so certain of the indissoluble nature of the bonds that bound the human spirit to the Divine, that he tended rather to ignore death or to waive it aside as irrelevant in the face of the God-given vitality of the soul.<sup>1</sup> Both prophet and psalmist, however, were at one in believing that the dead were not dead but alive, and that they were partaking in a fuller, richer life than they had ever lived on earth.

It is possible that all Old Testament students would not agree to this analysis of the Hebrew doctrine of immortality, with its emphasis on the three stages of its thinking. All would admit, however, that there was a time when Sheol, the home of the departed was considered a place of gloom and shadow, outwith the rule of God.<sup>2</sup> Whether that belief represents the first or the second stage in the Hebrews' doctrinal pilgrimage is immaterial for our argument. As far as Proverbs is concerned, it is the belief that is reflected in its pages. Of the later, fuller conception of the after-life as one lived in the nearer presence of God, there is not a trace in Proverbs. All that could be said of the dead was that they were in Sheol, that gloomy, insatiable pit, ever hungry for the souls of men. It may be said that Proverbs 15, v.11 marks a slight advance

---

1. e.g. Psalm 16 and Psalm 73.

2. e.g. Isaiah 38, v.10-20, 'the writing of Hezekiah ... when he was recovered of his sickness.'

in thought -

"Sheol and Abaddon are before the Lord",  
since a region that was 'before' the Lord cannot have been altogether beyond His sway. But the grim, bloodless, inhuman aspect of Sheol is much more prominent in Proverbs than any happier conception of it. The forbidding picture given in Proverbs 1, 12 is typical of the attitude of the book as a whole -

"Let us swallow them up alive as Sheol,  
And whole as those that go down into the pit".

With a Sheol such as this looming before the minds of earth's dwellers, the question of the setting and fortunes of the good man's life inevitably took a different complexion from that taken in later days by those who saw the righteous against the background of a God-given Eternity, and who were able to see a solution for the inequalities and injustices of earth in the vindication of heaven. Such a solution was impossible to the Wise who compiled the book of Proverbs. Yet some solution they must find. The problem was a peculiarly difficult one for them, with the conception that they held of God. They were insistent on His righteousness. They believed that He was also a God of action, Who manifested His nature in His deeds. It was inconceivable that the Holy One should do other than support and uphold the righteous, and condemn and punish the wicked. Sooner or later, goodness must obtain His reward -

"There shall no mischief happen to the righteous:  
But the wicked shall be filled with evil." (12, 21).

"..A righteous man falleth seven times, and riseth up again:  
But the wicked are overthrown by calumny." (24, 16).

Unless God were a cipher - an impossible premiss to the Hebrew mind - He must treat the righteous man and the wicked in different ways in this world: otherwise it was impossible to make sense of His moral government. By the force of logic, the Wise were shut up to the belief that the Lord linked prosperity with goodness and misfortune with wickedness.

So long as this point of view was presented from the religious end, as an honest effort "to justify the ways of God to man", it is difficult to quarrel seriously with it, especially when one remembers that the Wise could not bring in heaven to redress the balance of this life. There were those, however, in Israel, who had gleams and glimpses of a Divine blessing that meant far more than the bestowal of wealth or house or land, and who rejoiced not in mere earthly blessings but in the Lord as the portion of their inheritance. It is not to the credit of the book of Proverbs that there is so little trace of this point of view in it. Moreover, emphasis on worldly prosperity as the visible proof of the blessing of God has unfortunate results. Money and land can be seen and touched and handled; the blessing of God can not. It is not surprising if the interest of certain people, at least, should be expended on the material side rather than on the spiritual. The religious man for whom God is the centre of all, sees Jahveh punishing the idle man by hunger, and recompensing the righteous with good, but when the proverbs take their final shape in the collection, the first term that would have given meaning to the whole, is left out,

and attention is directed simply to the human subject and the circumstances of his life.<sup>1</sup> The next step is sure to be taken by some - that goodness is regarded as a means to an end, the attainment of good fortune, rather than as a consequent on a prior fact, the fact of God. When this is done, the nerve of ethics is cut, for goodness that is pursued for some ulterior end is no goodness at all.

On empirical grounds as well as ethical, the theory that underlies the book of Proverbs can be assailed. It is not true on grounds of fact that the good man spends his life in affluence and the bad in poverty, and even the comparatively simple organization of life in ancient Palestine must have afforded evidence of this. There is an occasional hint in Proverbs that the Wise had a suspicion that life did not always bear out their philosophy.<sup>2</sup> Men are told not to envy sinners. But if upright men are already enjoying prosperity, why should a warning against envy be necessary? Life is admitted to be very puzzling, and it could not have been so, if it had been in transparent conformity with the creed of the Wise -

"A man's goings are of the Lord:  
How then can man understand his way?" 3.

<sup>4</sup>  
The wise words of Agur show that one person at least had realized that riches were far from synonymous with the blessing of the Lord, but might on the contrary be a curse, inducing ~~xxxxxx~~ a mood of

- 
1. 19, 15. "The idle soul shall suffer hunger."  
13, 21. "Evil pursueth sinners: But the righteous shall be recompensed with good".
  2. 23, 17a.
  3. 20, 24.
  4. 30, 1-14 purports at least to be the words of Agur.

self-sufficiency and a proud disregard of the Eternal.<sup>1</sup> For the most part, however, the Wise held to the theory that the good man lived a life of prosperity while the wicked found himself in poverty - a theory which can be maintained only by shutting one's eyes to a large number of facts.

The same disregard of the actual facts of the case, the same sacrifice of life to the requirements of a theory, is to be seen in the Wise men's reading of human nature. According to them, people were divided into two classes, the evil and the good, the foolish and the wise. Men were either black or white. It was wellnigh impossible to be both. In part, this belief resulted from their high view of man and man's nature. He was a responsible being, endowed with free-will. Gifted with the high privilege of choice, he must make articulate his attitude to God in a decisive "Yea" or "Nay". Once the word was spoken, he took his place on one or other of the two ways, that led to or from God. The sages of Israel were not the only ones who envisaged life in these terms. "For the Greek the same fundamental truth was set forth in the parable of the choice of Hercules; the Buddhist Pitakas oppose the Noble and Evil Paths, between which a choice must be made."<sup>2</sup> Again, as has been pointed out,<sup>3</sup> the canons of Hebrew literary art pointed in the same direction as the

- 
1. 30, 8b and 9a - "Give me neither poverty nor riches; ...Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, "Who is the Lord"?"
  2. The Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament. W.T.Davison. p.157.
  3. See p. 100 of thesis.

Wise men's philosophy of human nature. If the sages were to use a certain poetic device, they must place their second line of thought in sharp contrast with the first, and follow their attractive picture of the good with a gloomy presentation of the bad.

The fact remains, however, that the righteous and the wicked cannot be sharply and completely divided off from each other. There are grievous shortcomings in the spiritual and moral make-up of the good man, and there are noble elements in the bad. It is impossible to subsume all the rich variety of human nature under the categories of good or evil.

If the psychology and ethics of the Wise are at fault in this respect, their error at least points to a theology that gives God His rightful place. So fundamental do they deem a man's attitude to God, that if that relation is wrong, all else is wrong. Since the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, the absence of that high and holy fear inevitably means the way of folly. Fundamentally, the Wise are right in thus viewing man 'sub specie aeternitatis'; their mistake lay in applying a noble truth to any and every individual at any specific moment of time. A man may be a fool to-day, and be heading straight for destruction, but since God is God, there is always the possibility that to-morrow he may be walking on the paths of righteousness. It must be admitted also that the Wise are somewhat facile in the way they dispense epithets of opprobrium. It is not possible for men,



however clear-sighted, to see with sufficient clarity into the hearts of others to enable them to appraise their moral standing. It is the Lord who tries and <sup>1</sup>weighs the hearts. The Wise knew this latter fact (if they did not fully realize the former), and in their appreciation of this fact lay the hope of a fuller conception alike of God and man, of a God Who worked in the hearts of all, both evil and good, of a God Whose power was so great, that He could bring about a seemingly impossible change in the life and disposition of man. In extenuation of the Wise this must be said. Their book has a strong pedagogical intent; it has the needs and temptations of young men much in mind. This being the case, it surely follows that its dogmatic teaching about the lives of the righteous and the wicked is intended not as a canon of fixed, unalterable laws, but rather as a body of warm, human counsels, directed to lead those who are lightly embarking on the way of folly to a nobler life.

Any criticism of Proverbs for grave omissions in its teaching, a certain homeliness about its ethics, the undue simplification of its views on man, and a note of harshness in some of its judgments, must be accompanied by an appreciation of the positive merits and value of the book. Its strong lights are more remarkable than its shadows.

It is easy to criticise the Wise for their humdrum ethics, but the fact remains that the homely virtues which they inculcate

---

1. 17, 3b; 16, 2b; 21, 2b.

are as necessary to the smooth ordering of the world's life as are the superhuman qualities of the prophet and the saint. So long as men marry and found families, buy and sell, and spend their lives amid the network of relationships that gather round the spheres of husband and father, merchant and citizen, the simple everyday virtues will be required. Of kindness and honesty, courtesy and conscientiousness, generosity and self-control, of these and their like it is impossible for the world to have too much. Virtues such as these, moreover, must be shown to have the closest connection with religion. Religion is not concerned only with the triumphant praise of the people of the Lord in the courts of His house, or with the saint's moments of high religious emotion, or with the prophet's vision of a renewed and transfigured Mount Zion. It has as deep and vital a concern with the pedestrian levels of the workaday world, with life lived when the conscious religious temperature is low as when it is high. Rational and true religion has its message and signification for all people, for the world's sons of toil as well as for the world's religious geniuses. It is one of the great merits of the book of Proverbs that it makes this unmistakably clear.

Reference is often made in theological writings to the 'religious genius of the Hebrew people'. The expression is undoubtedly correct. But all Jews were not religious geniuses. Scripture bears repeated witness to the fact that the prophet was a lonely, solitary figure, set in the midst of a stiff-necked,

unresponsive, uncomprehending people. That being so, there was always the danger that the prophet's religious fervour might be regarded as his own peculiar possession, unrelated to anything in the experience of ordinary men. In the same way the sweep of the prophet's social and political interests might cover a far wider range than the mind of the average man could grasp. Would the prophet's audience always be able to follow his line of thought? Even if the spiritual force of the prophets' utterances be left out of count, their intellectual weight is tremendous. If the plain man always understood the full significance of the oracles of Amos and Hosea, Isaiah and Jeremiah, the mental calibre of the people of Israel and Judah was of a very high order. While the prophets were busying themselves with moral questions, high matters of statecraft, and involved questions of foreign policy, the average citizen would doubtless be giving his main attention to his home and his business. It is the great contribution of the book of Proverbs that it brings religion into the small courtyard where the ordinary person spends most of his time, and shows that same person how he can and should<sup>1</sup> in his restricted sphere live a life after God's own heart.

- 
1. "The wise men probably rendered a quiet but solid assistance to the prophets, whose message was delivered in more general terms and with uncompromising vehemence: being the casuists and moral advisers of the day the 'hakamim' were in a position to individualize the prophetic message and to present it in a conciliatory manner." The Wisdom of Solomon. J. A. F. Gregg. p.28 (Introduction).

While the worth of the explicit teaching of the Wise on the ethics of daily life would be admitted by all, its value may be vitiated in the eyes of some by its mundane and moderate character. It cannot be denied that there is a calculating and worldly streak in the teaching of Proverbs. "The appeal is always to self-interest; it is rarely, if ever, that a higher motive is put forth; to refrain from evil because it is evil, or to do good for good's sake, is never held up as an ideal. Nor is it hinted that an evil course should be avoided because of the harm it might do to others, either by example or by more direct effect; and, in the same way, right action is not inculcated because others might benefit from it".<sup>1</sup> This is depressingly true, but there are facts to be considered on the other side. For one, the impression that Proverbs gives of a calculating, utilitarian outlook, is very much stronger when the book is read in English than when it is read in its original tongue.<sup>2</sup> As has been pointed out, words like prudence and discretion have a worldly flavour which the originals lack, and terms like intelligence or understanding have a thinner, more aridly intellectual sound than have their Hebrew synonyms. It is difficult for English minds to avoid giving these words their English rather than their Hebrew associations.

It is probably the failure to overcome this difficulty which accounts for the general idea that Proverbs throughout teaches

- 
1. The Book of Proverbs. W.O.E. Oesterley. pp. 61, 62. (Introduction).
  2. See pp. 92, 93 of thesis.

a 'safe' and moderate ethic. As a matter of fact, there is an abandon and thoroughgoingness about many of the counsels of the Wise which indicate a spirit very different from that often attributed to them. There is nothing cold or calculating about such words as these -

"Love covereth all transgressions." <sup>1</sup>

"It is a joy to the righteous to do judgement". <sup>2</sup>

"If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat;  
And if he be thirsty, give him water to drink:  
For thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head." <sup>3</sup>

"Better is a little with righteousness  
Than great revenues with injustice." <sup>4</sup>

If the good man is depicted as being well endowed with worldly goods, he is at the same time an attractive and lovable figure, strong and capable, kindly and generous, a popular, high-souled leader of men. <sup>5</sup> The picture given in Proverbs of woman is, as has been shown, <sup>6</sup> a much more positive and forceful one than that generally depicted in the Old Testament. The attitude of the Book to children shows a sense of the importance of the early years and an understanding of adult responsibility for child edu-

1. 10, 12b.

2. 21, 15a - i.e. When justice is done, the righteous rejoice.

3. 25, 21-22a. If the fourth line of the quatrain - "And the Lord shall reward thee" - be regarded as an inducement and not as a statement of fact, it must be admitted that the spiritual force of the injunction is considerably affected.

4. 16, 8.

5. See pp. 92-99 of thesis.

6. See pp. 107-109 of thesis.

ocation, that betoken a forward step in human thought.<sup>1</sup> Even in regard to business affairs, where above all it might be expected that prudential issues would be kept to the fore, the level of teaching is no low one. "As a matter of fact, the common-sense teaching of the book concerning business matters is far more clearly akin to the higher spiritual teaching which is usually characteristic of the Bible than men are ready to believe".<sup>2</sup> The Wise had a keen eye for the advantages of wealth, and yet they say -

"A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches,  
And loving favour rather than silver and gold." 3

They had a realistic sense of the misfortunes that poverty entailed; nevertheless they affirm that

"Better is the poor that walketh in his integrity,  
Than he that is perverse in his ways, though he be rich."<sup>4</sup>

A man's true wealth lay in another sphere altogether from that of the material.

"Riches profit not in the day of wrath:  
But righteousness delivereth from death." 5,6.

Despite this praiseworthy element in the teaching of the Wise, it may still be felt that on the whole their ethics are of a

1. See pp. 109-112
2. The Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament. W.T.Davison.p.194.
3. 22, 1.
4. 28, 6.
5. 11, 4.
6. It would be tempting in this connection to quote 4, 7 - "Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: Yea, with all thou hast gotten get understanding"; but Oesterley's note deters. "Wisdom is the principal thing. Neither this nor the R.V. marg. represents the Hebrew .. The Hebrew text has simply two isolated phrases: 'The beginning of Wisdom'". The Book of Proverbs.p.30

mediocre kind. This impression may be justified, but it is well to realize the source from which it comes. Such an impression is the product of the fact that the standpoint of Proverbs has been accepted and made the basis for a further advance. If, in the march of centuries, it be the case that people generally, through the influence of Jewish and Christian thought, have made their own virtues which in Proverbs are expounded for the cultivation of the good man, that fact is a tribute to the efficacy of the teaching of the Wise. No higher compliment could be paid them than to demonstrate that the virtues which they once so patiently inculcated had now become part of the unconscious ethical stock of those who inherited their writings, their successors being thereby enabled to attempt new and higher ethical achievements.

The discussion of the merits of Proverbs has, so far, been accompanied by qualifications which have taken away some at least of the force of argument. There are certain aspects of its teaching, however, to which nothing but praise can be given. The Wise who compiled the book were singularly free from the pride and spirit of aloofness that not infrequently cling to those who are wise in name. The prophets on occasion displayed more than a touch of querulous impatience with the follies of the ordinary man. Not so the Wise. They genuinely liked and appreciated the people they met. Speaking of the temper and spirit of the Wise man, A. B. Davidson says, "Of whatever kind they be, the observations are always good-natured and never betray irritation or dislike

on the part of the Philosopher. He walks through the bazaars and observes the peculiarities of oriental marketing: 'It is naught, it is naught, sayeth the buyer; but when he is gone his way then he boasteth' (Ch.2, 14). Or he remarks how our natural selfishness cuts into us somewhat deeper, and describes it with a certain caustic though even still kindly cynicism: 'All the brothers of the poor man do hate him; how much more will his neighbours go far from him' (Ch.19, 7) .....That philosophy which annihilates the individual, which recognizes mankind but not men, to which humanity is an ever renewing advancing tree, from which the separate leaves drop off exhausted, where 'the individual withers and the race is more and more' this philosophy is unknown to him .... Nothing human is alien to the Wise Man; he is philanthropic in the literal sense; every way of man and every expression of his mind or nature has a charm for him".<sup>1</sup> Yet he was no sentimentalist in his outlook. He did not shut his eyes to the follies and wickedness of men, as his numerous and pungent remarks on the fool show. But even in his most biting strictures, there is little trace of contempt. The fool, however great his folly, still deserves to be taken seriously.<sup>2</sup>

Those who take a keen interest in their fellows are liable to certain dangers. One is that their enthusiasm may be greater in

- 
1. The Expositor. Vol.12. 1880. A.B.Davidson. Article on The Wisdom of the Hebrews. pp. 387-389.
  2. Possible exceptions are 27, 22 ('Though thou shouldst bray a fool in a mortar, Yet will not his foolishness depart from him'), and 30, 21-22 about the fool who would make the earth tremble; but these surely have a whimsical humour at their heart, and are not to be taken too seriously.



depth than breadth. Within the small circle of their immediate associates, their consideration and kindness are unbounded, but beyond the circumference their interest does not extend. Or if their interest embraces more than kith and kin, it may yet stop short of those of another social class. Of this weakness, the compilers of Proverbs are free. They penetrate beneath the trappings of wealth and the rags of poverty to the man underneath -

"The poor man and the oppressor meet together:  
The Lord lighteneth the eyes of them both." 1

If the sages have any bias at all, it is in favour of the poor.

"The poorer classes of Jerusalem must have had many faults, but the Wise were very gentle towards them; scarcely ever do they reproach the poor directly for their shortcomings. On the other hand they have no mercy for the sins of those in high places ... This is the more significant and conscience-searching in that the speakers of these proverbs were themselves, as a rule, members of the 'fortunate' classes.<sup>2</sup>

More surprising than the sages' democratic attitude is their universalistic outlook. They belonged to a people who regarded themselves as God's chosen ones; they grew up in a mental atmosphere that became more and more saturated with the thought of the difference between themselves and others. To their land had been

1. 29, 13.

2. Studies in Life from Jewish Proverbs. W.A.L. Elmslie.  
pp. 258 - 259.

committed the knowledge of Jahveh, their Lord and their God.<sup>1</sup> Such a point of view was necessary if the peculiar contribution of the Hebrew soul was to be preserved and conserved for the world; but it had its dangers. Into this exclusive temper of thought come the Wise, and their point of view is entirely different. "The word 'Israel' does not occur once, the word *ādām* 'man' thirty-three times in the Book of Proverbs."<sup>2</sup> Jewish ideas and words, such as the Law, the Passover, Circumcision, the Sabbath, are all conspicuous by their absence in Proverbs. Silence on these matters might be accounted for by the date at which the book was compiled, but such an explanation would not be adequate to explain the non-appearance of words like Israel, temple, priest, prophet. "If", says Toy, "for the name Yahweh we substitute 'God', there is not a paragraph or a sentence in Proverbs which would not be as suitable for any other people as for Israel."<sup>3</sup> The Wise were not interested in the Jew *quā* Jew; they were interested in him as man. Of their proverbs, "very few must be considered Hebraic in an exclusive sense, or indeed Oriental.

1. Speaking of Hosea's conception of God, religion and life, Welch writes, "What engrossed all his thoughts was the historic religion which had made his nation what it was, which had given it a different genius from all the other nations among which it lived, and the loss of which would mean the loss of a great thing from the world. He did not speak of a God who was Lord of heaven and earth, but of One who had come into contact with this people, who revealed Himself through the deeds which had made the people's history and through the institutions which moulded its life. He believed that Israel in a unique way knew Jahveh, and that this knowledge was in itself the proof of the greatness of His love for it." (The Religion of Israel Under the Kingdom. p.111). This was the point of view with which the Wise were familiar. The contrast provided by their own is striking.
2. Job and Solomon. T.K.Cheyne. p.119.
3. The Book of Proverbs. Crawford H. Toy. p.21 (Introduction).

The mass of them have been at home in many lands and many centuries, because they speak to the elemental needs of men. Again and again they touch the very heart of Humanity. They are universal".<sup>1</sup>

In thus shaking off the trammels of a narrow Judaism, the Wise were making possible the wider contribution which Hebrew thought would later give to the Gentile world. "In the unfolding of the divine plan, prophetism ignored the individual and exalted the nation to the ultimate exclusion of the non-Hebrews. The wisdom school ignored the nation and exalted the individual until it recognized all men as brothers. In thought the prophets attained to the greatest heights, while the wise presented the greatest breadth. Without the former the Hebrew nation might never have been prepared to receive its priceless pearl of divine truth. Without the latter it might not have been able to present that truth to the world".<sup>2</sup>

Pioneers in the ability to transcend the dividing walls of nationalism, the sages were pioneers also in another line of thought, which later was to provide a bridge to the wider world of non-Jewish thought. One of the deep convictions which the Wise inherited was the belief that God spoke directly to the human heart. The words that came from the Most High were sometimes in the form of awe-inspiring revelations of His glory, and sometimes in the form of flaming commands. Were these the only ways whereby God communicated His will to Man? The Wise said, "No". They made plain the fact

- 
1. Studies in Life from Jewish Proverbs. W.A.L.Elmslie. p.34.
  2. The Wise Men of Ancient Israel and Their Proverbs. C.F.Kent. p.30.

that in all spheres of noble life, God was revealing Himself. This belief of the Wise provided a point of contact with all that was fair and true in the heritage of other lands. "Hebrew Wisdom is the link between the more exceptional revelations of Old Testament prophecy and the best moral and intellectual attainments of other nations than the Jews. 'Wisdom' claims inspiration ... but never identifies itself with the contents of oracular communications ... Law and government (Prov.8, 15,16) and even the precepts of husbandry (Isa. 28, 23-29) are equally here productions with those moral observations which constitute in the main the three books of the Hebrew Khékma. The fact that the subject of practical ethics ultimately appropriated the technical name of 'wisdom' ought not to blind us to the larger connotation of the same word ... The versatility of the mind of man is but an image of the versatility of its archetype. 'The spirit of man is a lamp of Jehovah'".<sup>1</sup> In the main sections of the book of Proverbs this thought is not definitely articulated, but it runs implicitly through the collections of proverbs, and in the introduction appended later it becomes clear and explicit, though with a predominantly Jewish flavour. It was not until much later that in the mind of the writer of the Wisdom of Solomon, the full bearing of the Wise men's conception of wisdom was seen, and

---

1. Job and Solomon. T.K.Cheyne. pp. 117, 118.

the chasm dividing Hebrew and Greek thought was bridged.<sup>1</sup>

The book of Proverbs has many noteworthy features - its intimate knowledge of men, its appreciation of the ordinary virtues, its skill in making clear to the rank and file the meaning of the righteous life, its democracy of spirit, its universalism of outlook. But these are not its most outstanding characteristics. The most remarkable feature of the book is its basic conception of a righteous God and His offspring, Wisdom. The idea is treated in different fashion in the preface (ch.1-9), and in the collection of proverbs that follows. A. B. Davidson epitomises the difference as that between productivity and criticism. "In the middle chapters the Wisdom is creative; and, absorbed in the fascination of her own activity, and in the delight of expressing and revealing herself, she has no place in her own thoughts herself; in these early nine chapters she is become self-conscious; she is fascinated by her own beauty; she invites men to behold her and to love her".<sup>2</sup> Or the difference might be expressed thus; that whereas the preface deals mainly with the essence and inner nature of wisdom, an attri-

- 
1. In his introduction to his commentary on the Wisdom of Solomon (written probably 'about 125-100 B.C.') Gregg writes, "In the Wisdom of the Book of Proverbs he (i.e. the writer of the Wisdom of Solomon) found a means of reconciling traditional Hebrew thought with the cosmic ideas of Stoicism ... Accordingly, he propounds his doctrine of Wisdom as a fundamental unifying principle, which co-ordinates Greek thought with Hebrew revelation and correlates (as functions of the same being) the various operations of creative activity, guidance of history, advancement of science and philosophy, moral elevation of mankind, and mediation between God and man. In this way he hopes, while never passing the bounds of orthodoxy, to show that Judaism is ... standing in relation with truth wherever found". p.24.
  2. The Expositor. Vol. 12. 1880. A.B.Davidson. Article on the Wisdom of the Hebrews. p.382.

bute of God, the later chapters treat rather of wisdom in action in the hearts and lives of men. Cheyne puts it in this way, "The keynote of the anthology is nothing but Experience; that of the introductory treatise is Divine Teaching".<sup>1</sup> The points of view are complementary, and together form a most impressive unity. The attitude of the preface gives to the conception the spacious background of Eternity, while the view-point of the succeeding chapters brings Heaven down to earth, and shows Divine Wisdom incarnate in the lives of humble men.

"The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way,  
Before his works of old.  
I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning,  
Or ever the earth was." 2

This is how the writer of the preface expresses his thought of Wisdom. The Wise who compiled the main sections show that same eternal Wisdom exhorting a man to build a house,<sup>3</sup> or listen to advice,<sup>4</sup> or speak judiciously.<sup>5</sup>

There are simple souls to whom the abstraction 'Wisdom' is a difficult concept, and who prefer to think of God. So it comes about that in the parts of the book that contain the proverbs of the people, there is less said about Wisdom and more about God.

"...The Lord weigheth the spirits.  
Commit thy works unto the Lord,  
And thy thoughts shall be established.  
The Lord hath made everything for its own end." 6

- 
1. Job and Solomon. T.K.Cheyne. p.156.
  2. 8, 22-23.
  3. 24, 3a.
  4. 12, 15b.
  5. 16, 23.
  6. 16, 2b-4a.

As has already been shown, the picture given of God in Proverbs is no poor one.<sup>1</sup> He is a God of Wisdom and righteousness, and the thought of His Fatherly care is not far away from the writers' minds. They do not speak of Him with the fire of the prophets, nor do they exult in Him as do the psalmists. Yet in their sober, restrained fashion they make it indubitably plain that He is a God worthy of man's deepest reverence and fullest allegiance.

A book that contains such an exalted and yet humble view of one of God's attributes, Wisdom, envisaging her as dwelling eternally with God, and yet at home in the prosaic life of man - such a book has no small contribution to give to the world's thought of wisdom. And a book that refuses, on the one hand, to be intoxicated by the charm of wisdom, and on the other, to be intimidated by the mundane character of everyday life, but that sees both clarified and illuminated by the prior fact of God - such a book has something of lasting value to give to the ethics, philosophy and theology of man.

---

1. See pp. 127-130 of thesis.

## CHAPTER 5.

THE ANALECTS OF CONFUCIUS.

(1)

Introduction.

Neither the book of Proverbs nor the Confucian Analects have been altogether fortunate in the titles affixed to their English translations. The Hebrew word, מִשְׁלֵי Mishle, is a rich, wide term, that includes within its ample folds the folk-proverbs of the people, poems of many kinds - poems composed of parallel sayings, taunting poems, didactic poems or psalms and short ethical sayings. When מִשְׁלֵי is replaced by 'The Proverbs', the title suffers a certain restriction and impoverishment, losing the literary flavour that had accompanied the Hebrew term. The Chinese classic, on the other hand, after the translator has done his work upon it, suffers from the opposite defect. The Chinese characters 論語<sup>2</sup> Lun Yü mean 'Discourses and Dialogues',<sup>3</sup> or more simply, 'Conversations' (Gespräche), an easily understandable title, which 'The Analects' does its best to hide. When to the word 'Analects' is added 'of Confucius', the uninitiated might well imagine that it is a philosophical treatise by Confucius himself.

---

1. The Book of Proverbs. W.O.E. Oesterley. pp.4-5.

2. Soothill prefers the title 'The Dialogues of Confucius', but feels that since the term 'Analects' has become technical, it is wiser to keep to it. Ku Hung Ming's translation bears the title 'The Discourses and Sayings of Confucius'.

3. Confucius and Confucianism. Richard Wilhelm. p.72 (footnote).



The opposite is the case. The book was not written by himself, nor, in all probability, by his immediate disciples,<sup>1</sup> but by members of the Confucian school of the next generation. They collected from such disciples of Confucius as they could meet, the data which, doubtless after much discussion and comparison of memoranda, they put together in the 'Digested Conversations'.

Some of the disciples would chiefly remember intimate personal details about Confucius' appearance and personal habits - his dress at court or at home, in hot weather or at night,<sup>2</sup> the way he received the Prince's visitors,<sup>3</sup> and carried the ducal mace,<sup>4</sup> his fastidiousness in regard to food,<sup>5</sup> his thoughtfulness when he met a blind man<sup>6</sup> or one in deep mourning.<sup>7</sup> Other disciples of a philosophic turn of mind, would remember maxims of their Master, rich in wisdom, pregnant in suggestiveness, and with a deep universal truth at their heart,<sup>8</sup> relevant to any circumstance or time.

1. "Confucius is credited by tradition with having had approximately seventy disciples with whom he came into intimate contact, though he is said to have influenced to some extent a much larger number." (The Origin and Development of the State Cult of Confucius. John K. Shryock. p. 9.)

2. Bk.10, ch.6.

3. 10,3.

4. 10,5.

5. 10,8.

6. 10,16.

7. 10,16.

8. e.g. 2,1; 4,15; 4,25; 12,11.

Others again, would have stamped on their minds vivid memories of particular situations and occasions when Confucius had uttered trenchant remarks on the situation.<sup>1</sup> All these varied contributions are collected in the Analects. The book, therefore, is not nearly so formal as its English title suggests.

The Analects might not unhappily be regarded as a compendium of Confucius' table-talk. It is, however, table-talk in a peculiar Chinese sense. We shall not look in it for the brilliance, the thought-provoking unexpectedness, the artistic colour, that mark the words of the conversationalist of genius. The Chinese mind, as a rule, prefers the normal to the abnormal, the ordinary to the fantastic, the levels to the heights. In this respect, it is markedly different from that of the rest of Asia. "In qualifying the Chinese mind as prosaic", says James Clark, "and in calling the writings of Confucius and his successors prose, we intend no disrespect to either. Prose is as good as poetry..... Accustomed to regard the East as the land of imagination; reading in our childhood the wild romances of Arabia; passing, in the poetry of Persia, into an atmosphere of tender and entrancing song; then, as we go farther East, into India, encountering the vast epics of Maha-Bharata and the Ramayana; we might naturally expect to find in far Cathay a still wilder flight of the Asiatic Muse. Not at all. We drop at once from unbridled romance into the most

---

1. e.g. 3,17; 6,10; 9,13; 11,11.

colourless prose. Another race comes to us, which seems to have no affinity with Asia, as we have been accustomed to think of Asia. No more aspiration, no flights of fancy, but the worship of order, decency, propriety, and peaceful commonplaces...All in these writings is calm, serious, and moral. They assume that all men desire to be made better, and will take the trouble to find out how they can be made so. It is not thought necessary to entice them into goodness by the attractions of eloquence, the charm of imagery, or the fascination of a brilliant wit. These philosophers have a Quaker style, a dress of plain garb, used only for clothing the thought, not at all for its ornament.<sup>1</sup> What Clark says of Chinese philosophy in general is certainly true of the Analects.

In another respect, 'The Conversations' are different from table-talk as generally understood. "No man ever talked the language of these sayings", says Leonard Lyall. "Such pith and smoothness is only reached by a long process of rounding and polishing."<sup>2</sup> This is more easily understood when one realises the distinction that exists in China between the spoken and the written word. The latter has a permanence, a literary flavour, a sanctity that the former has not. It must be refined and polished until it reaches as near as can be the standard of perfection.

---

1. Ten Great Religions. James F. Clark. Pt.1, p. 33.

2. Sayings of Confucius. p.13 (Intro.)

The form of the Chinese ideogram deepens this tendency to exalt the supremacy of the written word. Whereas the spoken word appeals only to the ear, the written character appeals both to eye and ear. The Chinese reader gains from it not only a sense of artistic delight at the beauty of its form, but an intellectual satisfaction greater than that afforded to a Western mind by a symbol built up of letters. A European word, in the majority of cases, conveys little more than a knowledge of its sound and meaning. The Chinese character, on the other hand, not only may, through its radical, suggest the sense of the word or give the category to which it belongs, and through its phonetic, give some idea of the sound of the word, but it may also shed a flood of light on the conditions of life and thought in the far-off days when the characters were first composed. Thus - to take a few examples - the character for 'ching', a well, in its old form 井 (new form 井) "shows how eight families formed a village and cultivated in common, for the purposes of taxation, the middle square where the well was situated".<sup>1</sup> The character 仁 'jen' or virtue, one of the staple words of the Analects, is composed of 亻 'man' and 二 'two'. The character thus shows that the fundamental significance of virtue lies in its social implication, a man being virtuous only as he is in right relationship with his fellows.

---

1. Sound and Symbol in Chinese. Bernhard Karlgren. p.45.  
Confucius uses the character 井 in the Analects in 6,24.

The cast of Confucius' mind also tended in the same direction, of making for the exaltation of the written symbol. Both temperamentally and philosophically, Confucius was meticulously careful in his use of words. In his personal habits he was almost finical, and the same scrupulous care that he exercised in matters of dress and decorum, he would certainly show in that which concerned him more than these, in his pedagogical and literary work. To him, exactitude in the use of words was part of his philosophy<sup>1</sup> of life. He held a doctrine of ideas that was not unlike Plato's. Each object or quality or idea had an essential inner essence, to which the word or name given must conform. Should the wrong word be used to describe a thing, the name failed to correspond with reality, and disharmony ensued. The rectification of names was a cardinal feature of Confucius' philosophy. It was a doctrine that had to face criticism, as the frank expostulation of one of his disciples showed. "Master, you have erred greatly; what shall this rectification avail?" But Confucius was ready with his answer. "How untutored you are, Yu! If the names be not correct, the judgments are not clear. If the judgments are not clear, the

---

1. In explaining the difference between Plato's doctrine and that of Confucius, Wilhelm says, "The whole (Chinese) concept is given a practical turn. With Plato, ideas are the eternal images of actual terrestrial objects. These objects have a share in the idea, and the scale of values is measured according to this share in the idea. For Confucius, it is a question of recognising the true names, not only to measure reality by them, but also to be able to reform reality." (Confucius and Confucianism. p. 151.)

works are not accomplished. If the works are not accomplished, then rites and music do not flourish. If rites and music do not flourish, punishments are not equitable. If the punishments are not just, then the people are at a complete loss. The Sage always gives such a turn to his actions that they can be called by their right names and always gives such a turn to his judgments that they can be carried out. The Sage permits nothing inexact in his words.<sup>1</sup> A man who spoke like this would surely so influence his disciples, that no literary documents would leave their hands until the highest possible standard of excellence in form and exactitude in expression had been attained.

Of recent years, Chinese scholars, trained in Western methods of research and criticism, have been giving much thought to the question of the genuineness of the ancient classics. Some of these have fared ill at their hands.<sup>2</sup> Thus, of the 'Five Classics', Hu Shih, one of the ablest thinkers of China to-day, accepts only the Book of Poetry in its entirety.<sup>3</sup> The Analects has also been subjected to the severest scrutiny, and it has not emerged altogether unscathed from the ordeal. The last five books have been called in question, and Professor Ku Chieh-kang recognises only a part of the Analects as giving the genuine ideas of Confucius. For the most part, however, the book has justified its

1. Analects, 13,3. Wilhelm's trans. Confucius and Confucianism. p. 51.

2. The Political Philosophy of Confucianism. Leonard Shihlien Hsü. pp. 13-14 (Intro.), 14-23.

3. The Development of the Logical Method in Ancient China. Hu Shih. p. 1 (preface).

position. Hu Shih, drastic critic though he be, quotes from it and even from the doubtful books,<sup>1</sup> and it is generally regarded by modern Chinese scholars as reliable, as being in fact the only<sup>2</sup> reliable source for the study of the ideas of Confucius himself. This point of view is shared by the Continental scholar, Wilhelm, who speaks<sup>3</sup> of it as offering "all in all, thoroughly reliable material." "This work", he says, "is, at the present time, quite correctly considered the most direct and reliable source which we have for Confucius, his life, and his doctrines..... It may safely be assumed that data or traditions regarding the 'Master' form the sources of the work, and that these were given their final form by the next succeeding generation."<sup>4</sup>

- 
1. The Development of the Logical Method in Ancient China. pp.21-27, 47, 52.
  2. The Political Philosophy of Confucianism. Leonard S. Hsu. pp. 20,23.
  3. Confucius and Confucianism. p. 74.
  4. Ibid. p.133.

(2)

Confucius.

The Lun Yü deals with a large number of subjects - character, sincerity, filial piety, the lesser virtues, the treatment of one's enemies, the government of a state, religion, the influence of heredity and environment, the good man, the superior man, the teacher and the training of youth, study and the student, friends and friendship..... Nevertheless, despite the number and range of the topics discussed, the book is a unity. The guiding thread is to be found in Confucius himself. He is the *raison d'être* and the heart of the Analects. What kind of man was he, this philosopher of the ancient world, whose table-talk has been not only preserved for two thousand four hundred years but known and revered, and whose influence on the untold millions of his countrymen has been "greater than that of any man who ever lived, excepting the writers of the Bible"<sup>1</sup>?

The world in which he was born was a world rich in epoch-making events and outstanding in great men. "It was a momentous period", says Alexander, "pregnant with great events. It included the downfall of Lydia, Media, and Babylonia, and the establishment of Persia upon their ruins; the release of the Jews from their seventy years' captivity, and the rebuilding of the

---

1. Ten Great Religions. J.F. Clark. p.44.



temple which was not to be again destroyed till after the coming of the promised Messiah; the rise of Buddhism in India; the restoration of democracy in Athens; the expulsion of the Tarquins from Rome; the invasion of Greece by the Persians, and the battles of Marathon, Thermophylæ, and Salamis.

"It was an age of great men. Sakya Buddha, the religious reformer; Ezekiel and Daniel, Haggai and Zachariah, amongst the prophets; Cyrus the Great, Cambyses, Darius, and Xerxes of the powers of the earth; Pythagoras, the Samian philosopher; the writers, Pindar, Aeschylus, and Anacreon; Leonidas the Spartan, Miltiades and Themistocles the Athenians, and a host of others too numerous for mention."<sup>1</sup>

But if it were a momentous period in world history, there was little to encourage or inspire those who looked out on that section of the world that fell within the boundaries of the Chinese Empire.<sup>2</sup> As has already been shown,<sup>3</sup> the political situation of that day held out little hope or encouragement. The Golden Age of Chinese history seemed to have receded to a distant past. Incessant warfare, the rise and fall of petty states, corruption in high places, poverty and distress among the ranks of the people, and a general lowering of morals - these were some of the

1. Confucius, The Great Teacher. G.G. Alexander. pp. 7,8.

2. The China of these days was very different in size from the China of to-day. The territory under the sway of the Chow kings (1122-256) was not a sixth of the present territory, and the population from 10-15 millions. (En. Brit., Vol. 6, 11th Edit., p. 907.) The population now is about four hundred and fifty millions.

3. p. 10 of thesis.

characteristic marks of life as Confucius saw it, under the regime of the Eastern Chow dynasty.<sup>1</sup> Not only did he see these conditions with his own eyes in the world around him; his work as editor of the Shih Ching would make plain that the generations that went before had suffered even as his own was suffering.

"Here is a song of a soldier:

'What leaves are not yellow!  
What day do we not march!  
What man is not wandering -  
Serving in some corner of the kingdom!

What leaves have not turned purple!  
What man is not torn from his wife!  
Mercy be on us soldiers:-  
Are we not also men?'

(Pt.2, Bk.12,10.)"

Here is a plaintive lyric that shows how terrible were the economic conditions of the day:

'The flowers of the bigonia  
Are in glorious yellow,  
But my heart is sad  
I feel its wound.

The flowers now are gone;  
There are only the leaves full green.  
Ah! Had I known it would be thus with me,  
I had better not have been born.

Hunger has swollen the ewes' heads;  
Nothing but the reflected stars in the fish-trap.  
If some men have aught to eat,  
Few can get their fill.'

(Pt.2, Bk.8,9).

The following poems show why these things were so; the rulers had forgotten the meaning of honour and justice and kindness.

'Lofty is that southern hill,  
With its masses of rocks!  
Awe-inspiring are you, O grand Ministers of State  
And the people all look at you!  
A fire burns in our grieving hearts;  
And in earnest are we.  
The kingdom is verging to extinction:  
Why are you still blind to this state of things?

You awe-inspiring Ministers of State,  
Why are you so unjust?  
Heaven is multiplying its afflictions;  
The people are grumbling,  
And yet you do not correct nor bemoan yourselves!§

(Pt.2, Bk.4,7.)

And this, devastating in its explicitness,

'Men had their land and farms,  
But you have them now.  
Men had their people and retainers,  
But these you have taken from them.  
Here is an innocent man,  
But you have imprisoned him.  
There is a guilty man,  
But you have let him go free.'

(Pt.3, Bk.3,10.)

And this grimly bitter one -

'Large rats! Large rats!  
Do not eat our millet.  
Three years we have tolerated you,  
But you have shown no regard for us.  
We will leave you,  
And go to that happy land -  
Happy land! Happy land!  
Where shall we find our peace.' 1

(Pt.1, Bk.9,7.)

---

1. From the Shih Ching, quoted by Hu Shih, The Development of the Logical Method in Ancient China. pp.4-9.

It was little wonder that a contemporary of Confucius should write, "The whole world in one seething torrent".<sup>1</sup> This, then,<sup>2</sup> was the condition of things amid which Confucius was born and in which he passed his life.

The seventy-three years of his life (551-479 B.C.) can roughly be divided into five periods<sup>3</sup> - his youth, when the fascination of study is already beginning to lay hold of him ("At fifteen", he says, "I had my mind bent on learning.")<sup>4</sup>, the period of his work as a teacher, the middle stage when he holds important political office, the fourth period, when he becomes an itinerant teacher, and the last, when his whole time and energy are given to literary work on the classics. During his life he enjoyed at times spells of success and prosperity. In the second period, he was regarded as an able and effective teacher. "His pupils", says Sse-Ma Ch'ien, "grew ever greater in numbers, while from all sides, from far distant regions, disciples flocked to him."<sup>5</sup> During his time of office in the

1. From the Shih Ching, quoted by Hu Shih, The Development of the Logical Method in Ancient China. p. 22.
2. 551 B.C. is the date generally accepted as the year of Confucius' birth, though Sse-Ma Ch'ien gives it as 550.
3. There is, of course, no hard and fast break between the different periods. As a young man he held minor office, and in one sense he was a teacher from the second period to the last.
4. Analects. 2.4. (Legge's trans.)
5. The Life of Confucius, According to the Historical Accounts of Sse-Ma Ch'ien. Quoted in Confucius and Confucianism. R. Wilhelm. pp.15,16.

state of Lu, he was, if Sse-Ma Ch'ien is to be trusted, a remarkably effective minister. "After Confucius had conducted the government of the state for three months, the sellers of lambs and of sucking pigs no longer falsified their prices, and men and women walked on different sides of the road. Lost objects were not picked up on the streets. Strangers who came from all sides did not need to turn to the officials when they entered the city, for all were received as if they were returning to their own homes."<sup>1</sup>

For the most part, however, disappointment and misfortune dogged his footsteps. For long he sought for office, and when he did gain it he did not keep it long. The very effectiveness of his rule roused the jealousy of the nobility; the incapacity of the Prince he served to put the welfare of the kingdom before the seductive pleasures of a bevy of dancing girls proved the undoing of Confucius, and after only a very short period of service in the most responsible official position of his life, he was forced to resign and leave his native country.

The next period of his life was even more depressing. For some thirteen or fourteen years he wandered, a homeless exile, from state to state. Attempts were made on his life; he suffered from the inclemency of the weather, from hunger, illness and the loss of companions. For part at least of the

---

1. Quoted in Confucius and Confucianism. R. Wilhelm. p.23.

time, his heart was set on obtaining the work that he felt he had been called by God to do - the all-important work of building up a State on the foundations of order and peace and good government. On every hand he saw states going to pieces for the want of honest, capable officials. He knew he could supply what was required. "If someone would make use of me, something would be seen in a year and a day; in three years, all would surely be settled."<sup>1</sup> *Chou*

During this period of exile, in his sixtieth year, a great change took place, according to Chuang Tze, in Confucius' point of view. In learning and the pursuit of wisdom he then found a goal that satisfied him - a goal that he had searched for in vain in the political world. If this be so, it is strange that for some eight or nine more years he still wandered from state to state, and still seemed to be hankering after political employment. Whether the change in his point of view was as final and dramatic as Chuang Tze suggests, or whether the repeated disappointments of those years slowly killed the thought of himself as the political rejuvenator of the country and brought to birth instead a truer picture of the growing, unconquerable influence of his literary work and his teaching, the fact remains that he finally gave himself up to literature. "Out of the conscientious, optimistic mediator of antiquity and the tirelessly active reformer, there grew, at all events, after his

---

1. Analects, 13,10. Wilhelm's trans. Sse-Ma Ch'ien places this remark during the wandering years of Confucius' life.

return to the quiet of private life in his native state of Lu, a calm philosopher of great superiority, who devoted himself to the study of the esoteric teachings of the Book of Changes, and who created for the world, in his Spring and Autumn Annals, his program for government - what might be called the foundation plan of Chinese culture."<sup>1</sup> During this period he gave himself "to editing and writing an Introduction to the Book of History 書經 to arranging the Book of Rites and Ceremonies, 禮記, the Chinese Leviticus; to classifying the Odes 詩經; and to rectifying the Music both in Court and Temple. 樂經 It is probable, too, that he at the same time supplied his disciple Tseng Tzu 曾子 with the material for the Classic of Filial Piety, 孝經. He also applied himself diligently to the study of the Yi Ching 易經, so diligently indeed that he is said to have three times worn out the leather thongs of his copy."<sup>2</sup> The closing years of his life were shadowed by the death of loved disciples, and the last scene of all is a sad one. "Early one morning, we are told, he got up, and with his hands behind his back, dragging his staff, he moved about the door, crooning over -

'The great mountain must crumble;  
The strong beam must break;  
And the wise man wither away like a plant.'

After a little, he entered the house and sat down opposite the door. Tszekung had heard his words, and said to himself, 'If the great mountain crumble, to what shall I look up? If the

---

1. Confucius and Confucianism. R. Wilhelm. p. 88.

2. The Analects of Confucius. Introduction. W.E. Soothill. p.53.

strong beam break, and the wise man wither away, on whom shall I lean? The Master, I fear, is going to be ill.' With this he hastened into the house. Confucius said to him, '..... No intelligent monarch arises; there is not one in the empire that will make me his master. My time has come to die.' So it<sup>1</sup> was. He went to his couch, and after seven days expired."

Taken as a whole, his life was a sad one. His home-life was not happy; his period of office shows him a lonely man, frustrated by his enemies, check-mated by the master he served; for all the success of his work as a teacher<sup>2</sup> and a man of letters, he himself for the greater part of his life seems to have regarded his educational and literary activities as second-bests, inferior in power and effectiveness to the actual work of government. Nevertheless, there are bright lights in the darkness. The affection and loyalty which he failed to find in the sheltered life of home or the public world of government, he found in fullest measure among his disciples. What Yen T'uan, the Master's favourite disciple, said of him, is an impressive tribute alike to the power of his personality, his ability as a teacher, and his remarkable faculty for leading his students past himself to the wonder of that which he taught. "The more I look up at it the higher it rises. The more I

1. Quoted from Legge's Antro. p.87-8. Introduction. W.E. Soothill. p. 57.

2. "He received extraordinary loyalty from his pupils while he was alive, and after his death they mourned for him as for a father." (The Origin and Development of the State Cult of Confucius. John K. Shrvack.n.3.)



probe it the more impenetrable it becomes. I catch a glimpse of it in front, and it is instantly behind. But our Master step by step skilfully lures men on. He has broadened me by culture, and restrained my reverence. If I wished to stop I could not, and when at times I have exhausted all my powers, something seems to stand majestically before me, yet though I seek to pursue my path towards it, I find never a way.<sup>1</sup>"

Again, there is an inspiring side to the failures of his political life. Neither hostility, opposition, the seductive charms of court-life, nor fear of the loss of the employment in which he felt he could do his best work - none of these could make him lower his standard, depart from the course of action which he felt to be right, nor curb the forceful, righteous activity of his rule. When the singing girls of Ch'i captivated the heart of the Prince of Lu, so that the ordinary business of the State was neglected and Confucius' plans for reform were ignored, 'Confucius took his departure', or, as the laconic Chinese has it, 子行<sup>2</sup>. "He passed the night in Tun. The Music-Master, I, escorted him and said: 'Master, no blame attaches to you.' The Master said: 'Shall I sing you a song?' The song ran as follows:

'O the singing of these women  
Has driven me from here.  
O the coming of these women  
Brings death and ruin.  
O Woe! O Wandering!  
Even unto life's end.'" 3.

---

1. Analects, 9.10.

2. " 18.4.

3. The Life of Confucius, According to the Historical Accounts of Sse-Ma Ch'ien. Trans. by R. Wilhelm. p.25.

A true understanding of Confucius is to be obtained far more readily from reading his words and the observations he made on life, than from a study of the events that befell him. Here the Analects renders royal service.<sup>1</sup> We see him, meticulous in matters of food and dress,<sup>2,3</sup> and punctilious about the orderly arrangements of his private and public life.<sup>4</sup> Yet when in the wanderings of the exile years provisions gave out and his disciples were exhausted with hunger, the only one of their company who maintained his serenity was the man who, in times of prosperity, would not "eat anything discoloured, nor that smelt, nor that was under- or over-cooked, or not in season".<sup>5</sup> So undisturbed was he by the privations that he and his disciples were undergoing, that he could still expound and recite the sacred writings, and spend his time in playing and singing.<sup>6</sup> When his angry followers remonstrated

- 
1. Hereafter the title of the Analects will not be given in the footnotes - only the number of the book and chapter.
  2. "He did not wear facings of purple or mauve, nor even in undress did he use red or crimson.... He always had his sleeping garment made half as long again as his body." 10,6.
  3. "He would not eat anything improperly cut, nor anything served without its proper seasoning." 10,8.
  4. "He would not sit on his mat unless it were straight." 10,9. "When his fellow villagers had a feast he left only after the elders had departed. When his fellow villagers held a procession to expel the pestilential influences, he put on his Court robes and stood on the eastern steps." 10,10.
  5. 10,8.
  6. Thus Sse-Ma Ch'ien in his Life of Confucius. Trans. by R. Wilhelm. p.45.

with him for his seeming levity. Confucius replied, "The superior man bears want unshaken, the inferior man in want becomes demoralised."<sup>1</sup> He is practising here what he preached when he said, "With coarse food to eat, water for drink, and a bent arm for a pillow, - even in such a state I could be happy, for wealth and honour obtained unworthily are to me as a fleeting cloud."<sup>2</sup>

A spirit of detachment such as this is not easily attained. The Analects frequently give evidence of the reality of the mental and spiritual training and discipline that Confucius passed through. The immense erudition that enabled him to edit the ancient songs and records of the country was not lightly acquired. Even in old age, his zeal for knowledge, and his refusal to be content with anything less than the mastery of a subject were unimpaired and unchanged, as his enthusiasm for the Book of Changes showed.<sup>3</sup> Sse-Ma Ch'ien tells a charming story, that illustrates the same spirit of perseverance. The Master was endeavouring to learn to play the zither. "For ten days, Confucius made no progress. The Music-Master, Hsiang Tze, said: 'We will try something else'. Confucius said, 'I have practised the melody, but I have not yet acquired the rhythm'. After a time, the Music-Master said: 'Now that you have practised the rhythm, we will proceed'. Confucius said, 'I have not yet caught the mood!

1. 15.1.

2. 7.15.

3. "If some years were added to my life, I would give fifty to the study of the Yi, and then I might come to be without great faults." 7.16. Legge's trans.

After a while, the Music-Master spoke again, 'Now that you have practised the mood, we will proceed'. Confucius said: "I have not yet ascertained what kind of man composed the music.....Now I know who he is.....If it was not King Wên, who else could have composed anything like this?" Then the Music-Master, Hsiang Tze, arose from his mat, bowed twice, and said: 'According to the tradition of the Music-Masters, it is actually reputed to be a melody by King Wên'.<sup>1</sup>"

The other side of Confucius' perseverance was his humility<sup>2</sup> - the humility which alike in regard to the attainment of wisdom,<sup>3</sup> the living of a noble life,<sup>4</sup> and the performance of duty refused to admit success. With all his knowledge and erudition, moreover, Confucius had the teachable spirit that was willing to get as well as give: "When walking in a party of three", he said, "my teachers are always present. I can select the good qualities of the one and copy them, and the unsatisfactory qualities of the other and correct them in myself."<sup>5</sup>

1. The Life of Confucius. Sse-Ma Ch'ien. Trans.R. Wilhelm.pp.35,36.
2. "The Master said: The meditative treasuring up of knowledge, the unwearying pursuit of wisdom, the tireless instruction of others, - which of these is found in me?" (7,2.)
3. "The Master said: 'In letters perhaps I may compare with others, but as to my living the noble life, to that I have not yet attained.'" (7,32.)
4. "The Master said: 'In public life to do my duty to my Prince or Minister; in private life to do my duty to my fathers and brethren; in my duties to the departed never daring to be otherwise than diligent; and never to be overcome with wine, - in which of these am I successful?" (9,15.)
5. 7,21.

A born teacher, Confucius had that interest in and understanding of people which is an essential part of the teacher's equipment. His students won his love in a way that one would hardly have expected from a man so self-contained and self-controlled as he. When one of his disciples died, the intensity of his grief amazed a student. "Have I gone to excess?" Confucius asked. "But if I may not grieve exceedingly over this man, for whom shall I grieve?"<sup>1</sup> When he was in exile, like a child he cried, "I want to go home. I want to go home",<sup>2</sup> and the source of his longing was his desire to see how his pupils were faring. He had the true teacher's reverence for the personalities of those whom he taught,<sup>3</sup> and he was a master of the pedagogic art of adapting his teaching to the respective needs of his students.<sup>4</sup> Rich and poor were both welcomed;<sup>5</sup> poverty was no bar to his presence.

The insight into his character and the consideration for the point of view of others that he showed within the academic precincts of his school, he displayed also in the outside world. He had the intelligent man's desire to understand the polity and

1. L1,9.

2. 5,21. (Wilhelm's trans.)

3. "The young should inspire one with respect. How do we know that their future will not equal our present?" (9,22.)

4. To the same question asked by two disciples, Confucius gave entirely different answers. "Ch'in lags behind, so I urged him forward; but Yu has energy for two men, so I held him back." (11,21.)

5. "From him who has brought his simple present of dried flesh seeking to enter my school I have never withheld instruction." (7,7.)

administration of the various states he visited, but he gained the information he wanted in a way peculiar to himself. Men volunteered the facts he desired to have, and enjoyed instructing his ignorance, and were altogether unaware that their frank confidences were the unconscious response to his courtesy, kindness and modesty.<sup>1</sup>

With all his appreciation of others, however, Confucius did not idealise human nature, nor expect a ready response to his teaching. When he was a young man, he had thought that the possession of knowledge meant that the battle was already won, since correct principles automatically worked themselves out in practice. Experience of life, however, compelled him to change his point of view. "Formerly my attitude towards others was to hear what they said and give them credit for their deeds. Now my attitude towards others is to listen to what they say and note what they do."<sup>2</sup> And there came a day when he renounced the hope of meeting a really good man. Were he to see a noble man, or a man of constant purpose,<sup>3</sup> he would be content. He understood too that it was one thing to present the truth and another to prevail on men to accept it, and he shrank from the suggestion that in order to win acceptance he should accommodate his message to people's desires. When one of his disciples said to him, "The Master's teaching is

1. "The Master's way of obtaining information - well, it was different from other people's ways." Ku Hung Ming's trans.(1,10)

2. 5,9.

3. 7,25.

so overpowering that no one on earth can bear it. You must, I think, bring it a little lower', Confucius said: 'Tzu, a good husbandman can sow, but he cannot make the harvest. A good workman can be clever, but he cannot always meet people's taste. The Sage may cultivate his doctrines, may arrange them and simplify them, may co-ordinate them and judge them, but he cannot bring it to pass that they be accepted. If you now think that one needs only to cultivate one's doctrines, and if you strive only to have them accepted, then, Tzu, your vision is not directed afar.'<sup>1</sup>

Thus spoke the philosopher. Sometimes, however, the preacher's passion to have his message accepted proved stronger than the philosopher's calm. "Who can go forth except by the door? Why will not men go by this Way?"<sup>2</sup> On occasion he had the joy of finding kindred souls who understood him. He was filled with delight when a disciple, admitting that the world could not understand his teaching, yet begged him to maintain his high standard.<sup>3</sup>

The best way to get to the heart of Confucius is to listen to his own statements about himself. "At fifteen I had made up my mind to give myself up to serious studies. At thirty I had formed my opinions and judgment. At forty I had no more doubts.<sup>4</sup> At fifty I understood the truth in religion. At

1. Sse-Ma Ch'ien's Life of Confucius. Wilhelm's trans. pp.46,47.

2. 6,15.

3. Said Yen Hui: 'What matters it that it is not comprehended? In the very fact that he is not understood, the Sage is recognised. (Sse-Ma Ch'ien's Life of Confucius. Wilhelm's trans. p.47.

4. 'the laws of Heaven' (Soothill).

sixty I could understand whatever I heard without exertion. At seventy I could follow whatever my heart desired without transgressing the law."<sup>1</sup> He lays bare his deepest wishes - "to comfort the aged, be faithful to my friends, and cherish the young."<sup>2</sup> He was very modest about himself, and admitted frankly his limitations: "As to being a Sage, or a man of Virtue, how dare I presume to such a claim! But as to striving thereafter unwearyingly, and teaching others therein without flagging, - that can be said of me, and that is all."<sup>3</sup> "There are three characteristics of the noble man's life, to which I cannot lay claim:- being Virtuous he is free from care; possessing knowledge he is free from doubts; being courageous he is free from fear."<sup>4</sup> When he heard that the Duke of She had asked one of his disciples for his opinion of Confucius, the picture he paints of himself is very attractive. "Why did you not say he is simply a man so eager for improvement that he forgets his food, so happy therein that he forgets his sorrows, and so does not observe that old age is at hand?"<sup>5</sup> Or, to take the fuller version of Sse-Ma Ch'ien - "He is a man who learns truth without growing weary, who instructs mankind without becoming disgusted, who is so zealous that he forgets his food, who is so

---

1. 2,4. Ku Hung Ming's trans.

2. 5,25.

3. 7,33.

4. 14,30.

5. 7,18.



joyous that he forgets all care, and so does not observe the gradual approach of old age."<sup>1</sup> It is a simple description, but it is probably nearer the truth than most self-portraits are and it is a not inadequate summary of the life of the man whose teaching we shall now study.

---

1. Life of Confucius. Quoted in Wilhelm's Confucius and Confucianism. p.42. According to Sze-Ma Ch'ien, these words were uttered in the exile period of Confucius' life.

(3)

# The Teaching of the Analects.

A.

## On Virtue.

The subject of Virtue occupies a prominent place in the Analects.<sup>1</sup> It provides the title for the fourth book, and the work as a whole contains a wealth of material on it. On several occasions, Confucius gave definite answers to those who questioned him about it. "Virtue", he told Yen Yuan, "is the denial of self and response to what is right and proper."<sup>2</sup> When Chang Kung asked him what it meant, he said, "When abroad behave as if interviewing an honoured guest; in directing the people act as if officiating at a great sacrifice; do not do to others what you would not like yourself; then your public life will arouse no ill-will nor your private life any resentment."<sup>3</sup> To Fan Ch'ih he said, "In private life be courteous, in handling public business be serious, with all men be conscientious. Even though you go among barbarians you may not relinquish these."<sup>4</sup> On

---

1. "The root of all Confucian ethical and political thought is 'Jen'." (Liang Chi-Chao maintains that it is impossible to translate 仁 into any one English word - so varied are its meanings - and simply transliterates it by 'Jen')... "In the simplest terms, 'Jen' means fellow-feeling for one's kind... In modern terminology, 'Jen' is characteristic of the qualities of man." (Chinese Political Thought. p.38.)

2. 12,1.

3. 12,2.

4. 13,19.

another occasion, he summed up the whole matter to Fan Ch'ih when he said, "Love your fellow-men".<sup>1</sup> Virtue, it appears, affects a man's public and private life. It is not dependant on circumstances and environment; it is to be exercised 'among barbarians' as in the precincts of the court. It is a social force, expending itself in love to one's fellows. At the same time it is ruthless in the demands it makes for the denial of self.

Quite as illuminating as Confucius' definitions of Virtue are the side-lights he throws on it as he discusses the virtuous man and the higher type of man, jen cho <sup>仁者</sup> and chün tsu <sup>君子</sup>. Inherent in the character <sup>2</sup> 仁 is the thought of virtue as a social factor. The virtuous man, the ideogram shows, is one who considers others as well as himself. In the inner spirit of such a man there is rest and peace.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, he is virile and masculine in the strength of his emotions. "It is only men of moral character who know how to love men or to hate men."<sup>4</sup> He is "sure to be courageous"<sup>5</sup> and he "will not seek life at the expense of Virtue."<sup>6</sup>

1. 12,22.

2. See p. 173 of thesis. Wilhelm translates 仁 by 'sittlichkeit' or 'liebe' which G. and A. Danton translate by 'humanitarianism'.

3. "The Virtuous man is at rest in Virtue." 4,2.

4. 4,3. (Ku Hung-Ming's trans.)

5. 14,5.

6. 15,8.

Confucius is concerned to show that Virtue is not bound up with quickness of mind and a ready tongue. "The man of Virtue, - he is chary of speech", he said one day to an astonished disciple. "He is chary of speech! Is this the meaning of Virtue?" asked Ssu-ma Niu in amazement. "When the doing of it is difficult",<sup>1</sup> replied Confucius, "can one be other than chary of talking about it?" On another occasion, when someone remarked that a certain man was virtuous but not ready of speech, the Master was quick to speak on the danger of a ready tongue.<sup>2</sup> And he was emphasising the same truth when he said, "The firm of spirit, the resolute of character, the simple in manner, and the slow of speech are not far from Virtue."<sup>3</sup> He defends his enthusiasm for reticence in speech - nay, more, for silence - on the highest grounds. "I wish I could do without speaking", he said. "If you did not speak, Sir", said Tsu Kung, "what should we disciples pass on to others?" "What speech has Heaven?" replied the Master. "The four seasons run their courses and all things flourish, yet what speech has Heaven?"<sup>4</sup> In line with his distrust of too ready speech<sup>5</sup> went a fine sense of the meaning of real culture and education. Were a man to excel in moral excellence and filial piety, were he prepared, in the

---

1. 12,3.

2. 5,4.

3. 13,27.

4. 17,19 - from one of the books regarded as doubtful.

5. "Artful speech and an ingratiating demeanour rarely accompany Virtue." 1,3.

service of his Prince, to lay down his life, and were he sincere in what he said in his intercourse with his friends, - "though others may speak of him as uneducated, I should certainly call him educated!"<sup>1</sup>

Whereas the characters 仁者 are, as a rule, translated by the English expression, 'the virtuous man', the characters 君子 require any number of English words to convey their meaning. Soothill translates 'chün tzu' by the noble man, the nobler man, the man of nobler mind, a man of the nobler honour, the higher type of man, a man of the superior class, the man of superior order, the wise man, a man of honour, the ideal man, the gentleman, the true gentleman, the well-bred man. It is obvious that "chün tzu" is a rich and comprehensive term. The person denoted by it "takes the Right as his foundation principle, reduces it to practice with all courtesy, carries it out with modesty, and renders it perfect with sincerity."<sup>2</sup> "The nobler type of man is broad-minded and not partisan. The inferior man is partisan and not broad-minded."<sup>3</sup> The former can see beyond the individual to the truth or falsity expressed by him. "The wise man..."<sup>4</sup> does not "depreciate what he says because of the man." The nobler type of man is no mere theorist. "He first practises what he preaches and afterwards preaches according to his practice."<sup>5</sup> He desires to be "quick to

---

1. 1,7.

2. 15,17.

3. 2,14.

4. 15,22.

5. 2,13.

act".<sup>1</sup> He "is modest in what he says, but surpasses in what he does".<sup>2</sup> In his work, he does not think about his position nor his pay ; what he is concerned about is his character.<sup>3</sup> "The wise man makes duty, not a living, his aim."<sup>4</sup> Nothing can turn him aside from Virtue - neither poverty, obscurity, nor the pace and peril of life.<sup>5</sup> So emphatic was Confucius on the close relationship between nobility of mind and the absence of fear, that a disciple was constrained to ask for an explanation, and the Master replied, "When a man finds within himself no cause for self-reproach, what has he to be anxious about; what has he to fear?"<sup>6</sup> "He disciplines and trains his spirit, not for his own sake, but for the sake of others. He cultivates himself "so as to ease the lot of others."<sup>7</sup> Behind 'the others' for whom he spends himself is a greater background, that gives dignity and spaciousness to his life. "The man of nobler mind holds three things in awe. He holds the Divine Will in awe; he holds the great in awe; and he holds the precepts of the Sages in awe."<sup>8</sup>

The chün tzu shows his nobility of spirit not only in great matters but in small. In the give-and-take of social life he displays the characteristics of the true gentleman. "The true

1. 4,24.

2. 14,29.

3. 4,11.

4. 15,31.

5. 4,5; 8,6.

6. 12,4.

7. 14,45.

8. 16,8.

gentleman is friendly but not familiar"<sup>1</sup>, "dignified but not pompous"<sup>2</sup>. He "upholds his dignity without striving (for it); he is sociable without entering and clique"<sup>3</sup>. On the field of archery,<sup>4</sup> whether he wins or loses, "he shows himself to be a gentleman". Naturally, a man of such charm of spirit and manner has many friends though of blood-relations he may have few. When a disciple of Confucius lamented that he had no brothers, he was comforted by Tzu Hsia, who, in the spirit of his Master replied, "When the man of noble mind conducts himself with self-respect, and is courteous and well-behaved with others, then all within the four seas are his brothers. How, then, can a chün-tzu grieve that he is without a brother!"<sup>5</sup> But with all his friendliness and camaraderie, the noble man knows that the secret of true life is to be found in his own soul, and not in the superficial contacts he has with others. "The noble man seeks what he wants in himself; the inferior man seeks it from others."<sup>6</sup>

A disciple once asked what constituted the character of a perfect man (成人). The Master gave the following reply: (referring to various famous men of the time) - "A perfect

1. 13,23.

2. 13,26.

3. 15,21.

4. 3,7. (Ku Hung-Ming's trans.)

5. 12,5. "All within the four seas are brothers" - a classic expression in China.

6. 15,20.

弟 皆 之 四  
也 兄 內 海

character should have the intellect of such a man; the disinterestedness of such another man; the gallantry of such another; the accomplishments of such another. In addition to these qualities, if he would culture (cultivate) himself by the study of the arts and institutions of the civilised world, he would then be considered a perfect character. But", Confucius went on to say, "now-a-days it is not even necessary to be all that in order to be a perfect character. One who, when he sees a personal advantage, can think of what is right, and, in presence of personal danger, is ready to give up his life; and who, under long-continued trying circumstances, does not belie the professions of his life:- such a man may also be considered a perfect character."<sup>1</sup> A character such as this is not easily attained. "He takes Virtue for his load, and is not that heavy? Only with death does his course end, and is not that long?"<sup>2</sup> But in other mood, Confucius is impressed not so much with the weight and burden of Virtue, as with its delight and its attainable character. "Is Virtue indeed afar off? I crave for Virtue and lo! Virtue is at hand."<sup>3</sup>

So many are the angles from which Confucius views the good man, and so various are his descriptions of him, that it is not easy to select the essential characteristics of the virtuous,

1. 14,13 (Ku Hung-Ming's trans.)

2. 8,7.

3. 7,29.



and to say that in these, above all, the vital force of his spirit is to be found. Two features, however, might be singled out as being especially emphasised by Confucius, conscientiousness and sincerity. "Take conscientiousness and sincerity", he tells Tsü Ohang, "as your ruling principles, transfer also your mind to right conditions, and your character will improve."<sup>1</sup>

In his discussion of the good man, certain references go to show that the doctrine of the mean was not far away from Confucius' thought. "Courtesy uncontrolled by the laws of good taste becomes laboured effort, caution uncontrolled becomes timidity, boldness uncontrolled becomes recklessness, and frankness uncontrolled becomes effrontery."<sup>2</sup> He refused to say that the excessively active Shih was any better than the excessively cautious Shang, since "To go beyond the mark is as bad as to come short of it."<sup>3</sup> There is, however, no elaboration of the doctrine of the mean and but scant reference to it, a fact surprising in view of Confucius' enthusiasm for moderation in all things, and in face of the emphasis placed on it in the Chung Yung. 中庸 The

---

1. 12,10. See also, 1,4,8; 15,35.

2. 8,2.

3. 11,15.

Doctrine of the Mean.<sup>1</sup> But if he says little of it, what he does say is eulogistic, "The virtue that accords with the golden mean, how perfect it is!"<sup>2</sup>

Is it possible to discover from Confucius' many references to man as he ought to be and as he is, what theory he held about human nature? Had he one? E.H. Parker declares roundly that he had none. "It cannot even be made out whether he thought man's

1. Chung Yung is said by Sse-Ma Ch'ien to be the work of Tse Sse, a grandson of Confucius. Whether this be so or not, its thought is generally held to represent a transition stage between the Analects and the works of Mencius.

#### The Greek Doctrine of the Mean.

After describing the difference between the arithmetical and the relative mean, Aristotle says, "If, then, every science accomplishes its work well, by keeping the mean in view, and directing its works to it..., then virtue, being, like nature, more accurate and excellent than any art, must be apt to hit the mean. But I mean moral virtue; for it is conversant with passions and actions; and in these there is defect and excess, and the mean; as, for example, we may feel fear, confidence, desire, anger, pity, and in a word, pleasure and pain, with too much and too little, and in both cases improperly. But the time when, and the cases in which, and the person towards whom, and the motive for which, and the manner in which, constitute the mean and the excellence; and this is the characteristic property of virtue....."

Virtue, therefore, is a 'habit, accompanied with deliberate preference, in the relative mean, defined by reason, and as the prudent man would define it'. It is a mean state between two vices, one in excess, the other in defect; and it is so, moreover, because of the vices one division falls short of, and the other exceeds what is right, both in passions and actions, whilst virtue discovers the mean and chooses it."

(Nicomachean Ethics. Book 2, Chap. 6.)

nature good or evil in its origin."<sup>1</sup> This, however, is too strong. From his work on the Shih Ching, Confucius would know the ancient ode,

'Heaven gave birth to the multitudes of the people,  
But the nature it confers is not to be depended on.  
All are (good) at first  
But few prove themselves to be so at the last.' 2

Since he held the classics in the utmost veneration, one would expect (in view of the lack of evidence to the contrary) that the theory held by the sages of old was adopted by himself. Moreover, his disciples of a later age believed strongly that man's nature in origin was good.<sup>3</sup> "What Heaven has conferred is called the Nature" are the opening words of the Chung Yung, and Mencius was a firm believer in the original goodness of man. It is unlikely that the Master's followers should have become firm exponents of this doctrine had there not been hints and adumbrations of it in Confucius' teaching. As a matter of fact, when the indirect evidence in the Analects is pieced together, considerable affinity with the point of view in the above ode is to be seen. Confucius believed that man's nature was in essence good, but that it was very liable to deteriorate and fail to reach the heights. "Man", he said, "is

1. China and Religion. E.H. Parker. p.57.

2. Shih Ching. Part 3,3. Ode 1. Chinese Classics. Vol.4, Part 2, p. 505. In his Religions of China, Legge gives a more popular translation.

'But men at first from Heaven their being drew,  
With nature liable to change,  
All hearts in infancy are good and true,  
But time and things those hearts derange.'

p. 102.

3. Hsüntse, however, held that human nature was essentially evil.

born for uprightness."<sup>1</sup> Since that was so, "Virtue is more to man than either water or fire"<sup>2</sup> and he could attain the end for which he had been born. "He who has really set his mind on Virtue will do no evil."<sup>3</sup> "If a man were really to exert himself for one single day to live a moral life, I do not believe he will find that he has not the strength to do it." Then, with his usual caution, he adds, "At least I have never heard of such a case."<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, Confucius realised that the way was so narrow and the gate so strait, that the number of those who found it would be few. "There are few who understand Virtue."<sup>5</sup> "I have never yet seen a man as fond of virtue as of beauty"<sup>6</sup>, nor "a man who could perceive his own faults and bring the charge home against himself"<sup>7</sup>.

The question whether a man's search for Virtue was to be successful or not depended on many factors. The individual's environment had an all-important part to play. To a certain extent a man was what he was, in virtue of that which surrounded him. "It is the moral character of a neighbourhood that constitutes its excellence, and how can he be considered wise who does not elect to dwell in moral surroundings?"<sup>8</sup> When a disciple asked Confucius about the practice of Virtue, the Master in his answer pointed out the importance of a good moral and social environment. "In

---

1. 6,17.

2. 15,34

3. 4,4.

4. 4,6. (Ku Hung-Ming.)

5. 15,3.

6. 15,12.

7. 5,26.

8. 4,1.

whatever State you dwell, take service with the worthiest of its ministers, and make friends of the most Virtuous of its scholars."<sup>1</sup>

If the closing words of the Analects are from Confucius himself, his view of human nature can, in part, be discerned from them. The main thought, however, is not that of the origin of man's nature, but its goal, and the means whereby the goal may be attained. The words are typically Chinese in their sobriety of statement and their practical bearing - "He who does not know the Divine Law cannot become a noble man. He who does not know the laws of right demeanour cannot form his character. He who does not know the force of words, cannot know men."<sup>2</sup>

---

1. 15,9.

2. 20,3.

## B.

On Religion.

'The Divine Law' which a man must know before he can become noble, - what is it? When Confucius speaks of T'ien, what does he mean? In a word, what is the religious teaching of the Analects? Before that question can be answered, a prior one must be considered - Confucius' own religion. On that subject, endless controversy has taken place. There are many who hold that Confucius was an agnostic, or at least a sceptic. In an article in T'oung Pao,<sup>1</sup> H.G. Creel gives the following list of those who incline to this position - Legge (in his earlier works), Grousset,<sup>2</sup> Suzuki,<sup>3</sup> Tucci, Carus, Giles,<sup>4</sup> Forke, Wilhelm, Hackmann, and Hu

1. Vol. 29, Année 1932.

2. "Sur les problèmes métaphysiques, Confucius professe l'opinion moyenne d'un homme public, positiviste et même agnostique par conviction intime, conservateur et traditionaliste par raison d'État." (By the Sage) "Les plus hauts problèmes de la destinée humaine étaient ramenés à une question d'utilité ou, mieux, d'opportunité sociale". (Quoted by Creel.)

3. Suzuki, speaking of Confucius and his school - "Their prosaic intellect always dwelt on things human and mundane".

4. Giles. It is strange that Creel should put Giles in this class in view of a quotation like the following:- "Confucius is usually regarded as a teacher of morals only, and it is considered wrong, therefore, to class his doctrines as a religion. This is no doubt true, in the sense that he laid stress almost entirely upon man's duty to his neighbour, thinking, perhaps without going so very far astray, that the liver of a blameless life would not be far from the kingdom of God. But it is certain that he believed firmly in a higher Power - the God of his fathers...who, so far as we can deduce from the ancient records, was satisfied with right-doing on the part of mankind in reference to one another, and in other ways was less exacting than the 'jealous God' of the Old Testament. Not only did Confucius..believe in the existence of this Deity, more vaguely perhaps than did the anthropomorphic worshippers of early times; but he was conscious, and expressed his consciousness openly, that in his teachings he was working under divine guidance." (Confucianism and Its Rivals. p.67.)

Shih.<sup>1</sup> To this group might be added the names of Alexander<sup>2</sup> and Johnston.<sup>3</sup> On the other side stand men like Legge (as represented in his later writings), Soothill, Giles, MacLagan, Shryock,<sup>4</sup> Creel,<sup>5</sup> and various Chinese thinkers.

What light can be obtained from the Analects on this much disputed question? In the first fifteen chapters there are fourteen references to Heaven - including two to the laws of Heaven and one to the will of Heaven. In the last five chapters, there are three more references to Heaven.<sup>6</sup> From these, it is not impossible

1. Hu Shih speaks of the 'agnostic humanism of Confucius' - thus Creel.
2. Alexander. "There does not appear the slightest pretension to a Divine mission in anything he said or wrote", (Confucius the Great Teacher, p.291) - an extraordinary statement in view of the Analects, 7,22; 14,37; 9,5.
3. Johnston. "It must be remembered that Confucius seems very rarely to have offered any remarks on spiritual matters on his own initiative: he did not profess to be an authority on such subjects and it was only in answer to direct questions that he said anything at all." (Lion and Dragon in Northern China. p. 325.
4. Shryock. After saying that the Confucianists certainly did not make any attempt to propagate religion, he writes "Sceptical critics like Hu Shih appear to go too far in the other direction when they deny any religion to Confucius and his followers. The Confucians were ardent supporters of the ancient literature, particularly the History and the Odes. These books contain the literary evidences of the old Chinese religion." (Origin and Development of the State Cult of Confucius. p.11.)
5. e.g. Hsu - "Confucius believes in one God." (Political Philosophy of Confucianism. pp.154-155.)
6. "The man of noble mind holds...the Divine Will in awe", 16,8. "What speech has Heaven?", 17,19. "He who does not know the Divine Law cannot become a noble man", 20,3.

to see what Confucius' own position was. At fifty, he "understood the laws of Heaven".<sup>1</sup> He knew that such virtue as he had came from Heaven,<sup>2</sup> that he was known by Heaven,<sup>3</sup> and that he was immortal till his work was done.<sup>4</sup> An insinuation of wrong-doing evoked from him the passionate retort, "If I have in any way done wrong, may Heaven reject me! May Heaven reject me!"<sup>5</sup> It were vain to attempt to deceive Heaven;<sup>6</sup> only Heaven was great.<sup>7</sup> "Death and life are divine dispensations" - thus Tzū Hsia reported<sup>8</sup> a saying of Confucius - "and wealth and honours are with Heaven". But the Heaven that gave could also take away, and in the hour of bereavement man's nobility lay in submission. When a favourite disciple died, the Master said, "Alas! Heaven has bereft me; Heaven has bereft me",<sup>9</sup> and when he visited a dying friend he cried as he grasped his hand, "We are losing him. Alas! It is the will of Heaven."<sup>10</sup> As a rule, Confucius was reticent in the expression

1. 2,4.

2. "Heaven begat the virtue that is in me." 7,22.

3. "Though my studies are lowly my mind soars aloft, and - does not Heaven know me!" 14,37.

4. "Since Heaven is not ready to destroy this enlightenment, what can the men of K'uang do to me?" 9,5.

5. 6,26.

6. "In pretending to have retainers when I have none, whom do I deceive? Do I deceive Heaven?" 9,11

7. 8,19.

8. 12,5.

9. 11,8.



of his religious views. Only to the inner circle did he unfold his deepest thoughts.<sup>1</sup> On one occasion, however, a suggestion that he might further his own interests by having recourse in a disloyal way to a certain powerful official met with one of the noblest statements ever made by Confucius - "He who sins against Heaven has no where left for prayer."<sup>2</sup> Certainly, as his disciples watched his life and conduct they were convinced that Heaven formed the background of his life, and that his power came from above. They remembered the way "he worshipped the Spiritual Powers as if he actually felt the presence of the Powers", and how he said, "If I cannot give up heart and soul when I am worshipping, I always consider as if I have not worshipped".<sup>3</sup> When a Minister spoke to Tsū Kung of the greatness of his master, the disciple replied, "Of a truth Heaven has lavishly endowed him, to the point of inspiration, and his acquirements are also many",<sup>4</sup> and a certain official, trying to comfort Confucius' disciples for their master's exile, said to them, "Why do you grieve, gentlemen, over this loss of office? The Empire for long has been without light and leading; but Heaven is now going to use your Master as an arousing Tocsin".<sup>5</sup>

1. "Our Master's culture and refinement (all) may hear; but our Master's discourse on the nature of man and the Laws of Heaven it is not given (to all) to hear." 5,12.
2. 3,13.
3. 3,12. (Ku Hung-Ming.) His English occasionally leaves something to be desired.
4. 9,6.
5. 3,24.

The evidence of the Analects for a real belief on the part of Confucius in the reality of the Divine power is strong, and this position is still further strengthened when one remembers the religious tradition which Confucius inherited. The Shu Ching and the Shih are filled with references to God as a living, potent factor in the world.<sup>1</sup> Confucius, it must be remembered, is emphatic that he is not an originator; he is simply a transmitter, 'a believer in and lover of antiquity'.<sup>2</sup> Since the ancients believed in Heaven, in worship and sacrifice and prayer to God, and since Confucius spent himself in the propagation of their doctrines, it would seem to follow that their beliefs were also his.

Why, then, this conviction on the part of many scholars that Confucius was agnostic, unreligious, non-metaphysical? There are two main arguments used in support of this position - one, his avoidance of the more personal term Shang Ti and his preference for T'ien, and, two, the guarded nature of certain of his remarks on religious matters. For example, he said this: "To devote oneself earnestly to one's duty to humanity, and, while respecting the spirits, to avoid them, may be called Wisdom";<sup>3</sup> and this: "When Chi Lu asked about his duty to the spirits the Master replied, 'While still unable to do your duty to the living, how can you do your duty to the dead?'" When he ventured to ask about death,

1. See pp. 39-45 of thesis.

2. 7,1.

3. 6,20.

Confucius answered, "Not yet understanding life how can you understand death?"<sup>1,2</sup>

With regard to Confucius' preference for the term T'ien rather than Shang Ti, two points can be stated. In his frequent use of the character 天, he was following the practice of the classical writers. "In the texts of the Shih and the Shu, taken together, the supreme being is designated as Ti or Shang Ti only some eighty-five times, while the name T'ien is used for this purpose some three hundred and thirty-six times. In other words, in the texts of the Shih and the Shu the supreme being is called T'ien four times for every single occurrence of Ti or Shang Ti."<sup>3</sup> In his religious terminology Confucius was what he claimed to be, a transmitter and not an originator. It must be remembered, moreover, that although 'Shang Ti' has as a rule a more pronounced personal signification than 'T'ien' has, the difference between their connotations is not a hard and fast one.<sup>4</sup> On occasion, the two terms are practically synonymous. When Confucius uses 'T'ien' in sentences such as these, "Though my studies are lowly my mind soars aloft, and - does not Heaven know me?"; "Whom do I deceive? Do I deceive Heaven?", the personal character of 'T'ien' is obvious, and it is wellnigh impossible to distinguish it from 'Shang Ti'.

1. 11.11.

2. Of significance also in this connection is the following - "The Master would not discuss prodigies, prowess, lawlessness, or the supernatural". 7.20.

3. T'oung Pao. Vol. 29. Année, 1922. p. 74. H.G. Creel.

4. See p. 40 of thesis.

What about his detached and coldly negative advice to respect the spirits and avoid them? Creel points out that 'avoid' is an unfortunate translation of 遠, and that the sentence should read, "...to respect spiritual beings, maintaining the proper distance in relations with them, may be called Wisdom". With this interpretation of Confucius' meaning, Ku Hung-Ming would agree, his translation running, "To hold in awe and fear the Spiritual Powers of the Universe, while keeping aloof from irreverent familiarity with them; that may be considered as understanding". If this is a correct reading, Confucius is inculcating not a cold agnosticism, but a worshipful reverence of the Divine.

In the 1932 number of T'oung Pao, Herrlee Glessner Creel has an interesting article on the religion of Confucius. Starting with the opinion that Confucius was an agnostic, Creel was led by a study of the evidence to conclude that the opposite was the case. He gives the following reasons for his change of opinion:-

1. "The earliest important productions of the Confucian School are totally lacking in that agnosticism which is supposed to be so evident in the thought of Confucius."
2. The thesis that Confucius was agnostic was not developed until the Sung dynasty, 1500 years after Confucius' time. "In the entirety of the pre-Sung commentaries studied there is not, it is believed, a single passage of a sceptical nature".
3. In the classical literature which Confucius edited, and in the Lun Yü there is most obvious evidence of belief in Heaven, sacrifice, etc.
4. The argument given above re. the unfortunate use of the word 'avoid'. The sentence should rather be regarded as an appeal for reverence.
5. The growing tendency towards rationalism in the later Confucian schools influenced their reading of Confucius' mind and teaching.

(Continued on next page.)

In view, however, of Confucius' reticence on the subject and the comparative scarcity of his references to religious matters, it is unwise to speak categorically of the religious teaching of the Analects, if by teaching is meant formal, systematic instruction. But if teaching be construed in a wider sense as the cumulative influence of Confucius' life, example and conversation, one is justified in saying that the Lun Yü bears witness to the reality of a personal, righteous Being at work in the cosmos, in harmony with Whose will man should govern his life.

---

(Note continued from previous page.)

6. With regard to the difficulty raised by the statement that Confucius did not discuss the supernatural (7.20), the impossibility is pointed out of basing a theory on an isolated passage. The Analects, being in large measure a collection of Confucius' obiter dicta, naturally contains the contradictions and inconsistencies to which speech is liable. Thus 9.1 says that Confucius seldom spoke about 'Jen' - yet the book is filled with remarks on the subject.

So much is Creel impressed by the above arguments that he goes the length of saying that "it is in the religion of Confucius that the very heart and the unifying principle of his philosophy is to be found".

## C.

On Politics, Education, etc.

As befitted one who would fain have spent his whole life in political work, Confucius spoke much of government. His remarks cover a wide range - the spirit and temper of the Emperor, the duties of ministers, the psychology of the governed, the results of wise rule, finance and taxation, punishment (with special reference to capital punishment), and the influence of ceremonies. Behind this many-sided teaching lies a unified philosophy of politics, which might be expressed in the formula, "As the Prince, so the People". At the head of the political hierarchy stood the Prince, the Son of Heaven, who was linked in a special way with the Power that ruled the world. In virtue of his high office, the influence of the Emperor was as deep in character as it was wide in range. His most fundamental responsibility was to live a life of Virtue. If he were virtuous, the people would be the same. The law of imitation made this inevitable. "When a ruler loves good manners his people will not let themselves be disrespectful; when a ruler loves justice his people will not let themselves be unsubmissive; when a ruler loves good faith his people will not venture to be insincere."<sup>1</sup> The Emperor not only

---

1. 13,4.

had to be good; he had also to do good. Since it was impossible for him, one single person, to discharge his responsibilities to the multitudes over whom he ruled, he had to delegate powers to his ministers. They too had to live in harmony with Virtue. As they were, so would the people be. When Chi K'ang Tzu asked how to inspire the people with respect and loyalty so that they might be mutually emulous (for the welfare of the State), the Master said: "Lead them with dignity and they will be respectful; be filial and kind and they will be loyal; promote those who excel<sup>1</sup> and teach the incompetent, and they will encourage each other". "When the highly placed pay generous regard to their own families, the people are stirred to mutual kindness. When they do not discard old dependents, neither will the people deal meanly with theirs."<sup>2</sup> The ideals that governed the practices of Emperor and Minister in their relations with those above and below (the Emperor was answerable to Heaven as his ministers were answerable to himself), would likewise mould the conduct of the people, of father and son, older and younger brother. "Let the Prince be Prince, the minister minister, the father father, and the son son."<sup>3</sup> When the Emperor,<sup>4</sup> in his exalted station, displayed the true

---

1. 2.20.

2. 8.2.

3. 12.11.

4. "Politically he upheld the rights of the ruler under the feudal system....It is unfair to stress his support of feudalism too heavily, since in his day any other system was unthinkable."  
(The Origin and Development of the State Cult of Confucius.  
John K. Shryve. p.6.)

spirit and temper of magnanimous rule, the father, in his lower sphere, would take the cue from him and would show the same spirit in the small circle of the family.

In three spheres the Prince's nobility of character and the Ministers' statesmanship would be manifested - one, in their personal contacts,<sup>1</sup> whether with Emperor and Minister, or Minister and people; two, in the success that attended their efforts to promote the prosperity of the country;<sup>2</sup> and three (the most difficult of all), so to envisage the future growth and development of the tendencies latent in the present, that the tendencies potential of good be developed, and those inimical to progress be destroyed.<sup>3</sup>

1. "A Prince should employ his ministers with courtesy. A minister should serve his Prince with loyalty." 3,19.

2. The essentials of government were "Sufficient food, sufficient forces, and the confidence of the people." 12,7. According to 13,9 the culture that was the result of education must be preceded by a certain standard of economic wealth.

3. The third point is not mentioned in the Analects. It is emphasised in the Book of Changes. "The Book of Changes" according to Wilhelm, "rests upon the assumption that all earthly happenings are in a constant state of flux, like the water of a stream, which flows on day and night, without ceasing. The individual conditions are developed from imperceptible, germlike beginnings. They then enter into the full effectiveness of their forces, in order, in the end, to pass gradually over into other conditions, after they have exhausted their forces. Now if one can recognize the nuclei, one can succeed in influencing events by giving an imperceptible direction which will lead to the wished-for goal of this development... This, for example, is the reason why Confucius opposed the method of regulating the state by means of laws and punishments; that is to say by means of force. The effect of such a system will only be an evasion on the part of the people, and a condition of universal hypocrisy. If, on the other hand, one works upon the manners of the people by means of the power of a direct influence, the evil influences are smothered in the germ before they can have any chance whatsoever to express themselves, and the goal is reached. Herein lies the deeper philosophical foundation for the strong emphasis on decorum and music in popular education, and for the rejection of external means of punishment." (Confucius and Confucianism, pp.151-153.)



Duties such as these could not be discharged in a moment. Time and endless patience were required. "If a kingly ruler were to arise it would take a generation before Virtue prevailed."<sup>1</sup> "Do not be in a hurry", the Master once said when the Magistrate of Chü-fu asked him what should be his policy. "Do not be intent on minor advantages. When in a hurry nothing is thorough, and when intent on minor advantages nothing great is accomplished."<sup>2</sup>

Something more than time and patience were required, however. Every conceivable device that made for good must be pressed into the service of the State. The fitting use of music and ceremonial was specially to be encouraged, since both of these made so manifestly for the destruction of evil tendencies and the development of good. "The Master spoke of the Shao as perfectly beautiful in its form and perfectly good in its influence. He spoke of the Wu as perfectly beautiful in its form but not perfectly good in its influence."<sup>3</sup> Only one thing was to be forbidden, or its extensive use strongly discouraged - the way of compulsion and punishment, and above all capital punishment. Since these failed to touch the inner springs of life, they were useless as a vital force in the political education of the people. As Confucius said, "If you govern the people by laws, and keep them in order by penalties, they will avoid the penalties, yet lose their sense of shame."

1. 13.12.

2. 13.17.

3. 3.25. Confucius' point of view on this matter is very like that of Plato.

But if you govern them by your moral excellence, and keep them in order by your decorous conduct, they will retain their sense of shame, and also live up to standard.<sup>1</sup> Even when Confucius was faced with the problem of the lawless and the brutal, he held to his position of the futility of force and the potency of education and example. "How true is the saying", he remarked, "If good men ruled the country for a hundred years, they could even tame the brutal and abolish capital punishment!"<sup>2</sup> "How would it do", Chi K'ang Tzu once asked him, "To execute the lawless for the good of the law-abiding?" "What need, Sir", replied Confucius, "is there of capital punishment in your administration? If your aspirations are for good, Sir, the people will be good. The moral character of those in high position is the breeze, the character of those below is the grass. When the grass has the breeze upon it, it assuredly bends."<sup>3</sup> A philosophy of politics has to reckon with facts, with the fact not only of those who at the bottom of the scale break the law, but with the fact of him, Son of Heaven though he be, who does not act as an Emperor should. On this, however, Confucius has only one remark to make, that a good body of ministers may prevent the dry-rot caused by the weakness or wrong-doing of an Emperor from spreading downwards through the whole kingdom.<sup>4</sup> It is, however,

---

1. 2,3.

2. 13,11.

3. 12,19.

4. 14,20.

not the thought of the possibility of the degeneration and failure of the Emperor that occupies Confucius' attention, but the thought of his immense power for good. In this respect, the thinking of the Chinese sage has close affinity with that of Plato, in his treatment of the 'philosopher-kings' of the Republic. There is, nevertheless, a subtle and characteristic difference, Confucian thought having a more markedly practical and less theoretical cast than that of the Greek philosopher.

What were the views of the Chinese sage on internationalism, and the problems that arise in connection with the contacts between one country and another? In one statement in the Analects, he speaks in appreciative terms of 'the tribes of the east and north'<sup>1</sup> but, according to Legge, his treatment of the subject as a whole is defective. "The only passage of Confucius' teachings from which any rule can be gathered for dealing with foreigners, is that in the 'Doctrine of the Mean', where 'indulgent treatment of men from a distance' is laid down as one of the nine standard rules for the government of the empire. But the 'men from a distance' are understood to be 'pin' (賓) and 'leu' (旅), simply, - 'guests', that is, or officers of one State seeking employment in another, or at the imperial court; and 'visitors', or travelling merchants. Of independent nations the ancient classics have not any knowledge, nor has Confucius."<sup>2</sup>

---

1. "The tribes of the east and west have their princes, and are not, like all our great land, without." 3,5.

2. Chinese Classics. Vol.1. pp.108-109. Prolegomena.

Legge's point of view on this question is not that of modern Chinese exponents of Confucius' position. They maintain that Confucius had a real international sense. "In Confucius' time", says H.C. Chen, "China was divided into many nations. The number of leading nations was twelve, and the total number of nations was over one hundred. Therefore, his country was not China, but Lu. Since Lu had intercourse continuously with other and independent nations, why should Confucius know nothing about them? These nations were called 'The multitude of Great States' and the 'Middle Kingdom'. This was the international society, and the term Middle Kingdom was like the term Christendom. Beyond this, there were at this time only rude and barbarous tribes, so far as the Chinese knew. This was the condition under which Confucius lived. By the term 'All under Heaven', however, Confucius really meant the whole world, and it included not only the multitude of great states, but also all the barbarous tribes....In fact, Confucius always keeps the whole world in his mind."<sup>1</sup> This point of view is strongly shared by Liang Chi-Chao, who points out that Confucius and Motze did not consider it wrong to visit different kings, making no distinction between their own country and others. "The Confucian School considered national government only as a means or as a first step towards world peace. The final objective was a state in which both the national and racial lines should be obliterated. Their highest

---

1. "Economic Principles of Confucius and His School" in Columbia Univ. Studies, vol. 44, pp.16-17, note. Quoted in Political Philosophy of Confucianism. pp. 232-233.

ideal was that the civilization of one country should be so enlarged<sup>1</sup> as to include within it all mankind on a footing of equality."

It is a short and logical step to pass from the ethics of the state to the ethics of the family. In regard to the question of which comes first, state or family, as a moral entity, Chinese thought, on the whole seems to resemble Greek thought and to begin at the opposite end from that usually preferred by the West. Unlike the modern Western point of view which begins with ethics and then branches out to politics, Greek and Chinese philosophy begin with the State and work down to the individual. "Only after many struggles of thought", says Jowett, "does the individual assert his right as a moral being. In early ages he is not one,<sup>2</sup> but one of many, the citizen of a State which is prior to him." This certainly is true of Hebrew thought as exemplified in Old Testament literature, and it is also true to a certain extent of the Chinese order of development. Granet, speaking of Chinese ethics says, "Civic morality is not a projection of domestic morality: it is, on the contrary, the law of the feudal citadel which has impregnated domestic life... While the domestic order seems to rest entirely upon paternal authority, the idea of respect takes absolute precedence of the idea of affection in family relationships. Regulated on the model of court assemblies, domestic life forbids all familiarity. Etiquette rules there and not intimacy....The son saw a

1. Chinese Political Thought. p. 175.

2. Introduction to the Republic of Plato. (Jowett's trans.) p.31.

relative in his father only after he had recognized him as his overlord."<sup>1</sup> Perhaps Granet is speaking here with a little more dogmatism than the situation warrants, in view of the fact that there are passages in the classics that suggest the opposite order. "Begin with the wife", it is said in one of the Odes, "and then the brothers and then the country."<sup>2</sup> Alike in the Analects, the Great Learning and the Works of Mencius, statements are made which suggest that growth in virtue consists in the ever widening application of 'jen', the love and loyalty that have been exercised in small circles finding greater scope in wider spheres. The fact of the matter seems to be that Chinese thought had such a secure grasp of the indissoluble connection between the individual and society, that it is almost impossible to say categorically which comes first in their thinking. The important matter to them was not the priority of individual or state, but their organic connection. So close was it, that it was almost impossible to think of one without the other; the health or disease of one inevitably affected the other. The heart of their point of view can be seen in the well-known words from the Great Learning ( 大學 ) - "The ancients who wished to illustrate illustrious virtue throughout the kingdom, first ordered well their own states. Wishing to order well their states, they first regulated their families. Wishing to regulate their families, they first cultivated their persons. Wishing to cultivate their persons, they

---

1. Chinese Civilization. Marcel Granet. p.311.

2. Quoted in Chinese Political Thought. Liang Chi-Chao. p.42.

first rectified their hearts. Wishing to rectify their hearts, they first sought to be sincere in their thoughts. Wishing to be sincere in their thoughts, they first extended to the utmost their knowledge. Such extension of knowledge lay in the investigation of things. Things being investigated, knowledge became complete. Their knowledge being complete, their thoughts were sincere. Their thoughts being sincere, their hearts were then rectified. Their hearts being rectified, their persons were cultivated. Their persons being cultivated, their families were regulated. Their families being regulated, their states were rightly governed. Their states being rightly governed, the whole kingdom was made tranquil and happy."

What, then, has Confucius in the Analects to say about 'the regulation of the family'? Here certainly the main emphasis is on the inferior status of the son, and his duties to his parental overlord. The truly filial son must follow the wishes of his father, whether the latter be alive or dead,<sup>2</sup> he must revere his parents,<sup>3</sup> remember their age,<sup>4</sup> and even if they deal hardly with him he must not complain.<sup>5</sup> While his parents are alive, he should

1. The Great Learning. The Text of Confucius. 4,5.

2. Or at least for three years after his death; 1,11. See also, 2,5 according to which filial piety means 'not being disobedient'.

3. 2,7.

4. 4,21.

5. 4,18.

not travel far,<sup>1</sup> and he will place the maintenance of his father's reputation above loyalty to truth.<sup>2,3</sup>

Of woman's share in the making and moulding of the family, Confucius has nothing to say in the Analects. He speaks very seldom of her, and then in a fashion that cannot be called complimentary. When remarking on the scarcity of great leaders, Confucius quotes the statement of an ancient Emperor to the effect that he had ten able administrators, to which Confucius appends the qualification - "One of its Ministers was a woman, so that in reality there were only nine men".<sup>4</sup> And he laments that women's beauty has a stronger drawing power than Virtue.<sup>5</sup> Though the sage says little of woman in the Analects, the 'Family Sayings' give a fairly detailed account of his point of view. "Man is the representative of Heaven, and is supreme over all things. Woman yields obedience to the instructions of man, and helps to carry out his principles. On this account she

1. 4,19.

2. 13,18.

3. Despite the emphasis Confucius lays on filial piety, the references to it in the Analects are not many. Dr. MacLagan says, "On the whole, in the Analects filial piety is not so prominent as one coming to them with our popular notions of Chinese morality might expect. Legge's saying that the Chinese have made almost a religion of filial piety is founded not so much on the Analects as on other records of the teaching of Confucius, in the Book of Rites." (Chinese Religious Ideas. p. 53.)

4. 8,20.

5. 9,17.



can determine nothing of herself, and is subject to the rule of three obediences. When young, she must obey her father and elder brother; when married, she must obey her husband; when her husband is dead, she must obey her son.<sup>1</sup> Parker's reading of Confucius' attitude seems fair and just - "His treatment of women was rather contemptuous, and he says almost nothing about marriage; but it must not be forgotten that all Chinese serious writings are scrupulously decent and reserved in their specific allusions to feminine matters; even empresses 'hearken to government from behind a jalousie'.<sup>2</sup>"

If there is little or no warmth of tone in Confucius' references to father and son or woman, his emotion finds an outlet in his glowing eulogy of friendship. "Is it not delightful to have men of kindred spirit come to one from afar?"<sup>3</sup> There is, however, to be nothing sentimental or uncontrolled in friendship. It must be broad-based on respect. Of a certain man Confucius said, "He knew how to observe the true relations in friendship. However long-standing his acquaintance with a man might be, he always maintained throughout the same invariable careful respect."<sup>4</sup> Neither was there to be anything enervating in friendship. On

1. The Chinese Classics. J. Legge. Vol.1, pp.104-105.(Prolegomena.) Modern Chinese critics say that the Family Sayings are not reliable. The Political Philosophy of Confucianism. L.S. Hsu.p.20.
2. China and Religion. E.H. Parker. p. 64.
3. 1,1. Ku Hung-Ming translates this - 'friends of congenial minds.
4. 5,16. (Ku Hung-Ming). According to the translator, the Yen P'ing Chung of whom the Master said these words was the Sir William Temple of his time.

occasion friendship might necessitate the giving of painful, though salutary, advice. When asked how one should behave to a friend, Confucius replied, "Be conscientious in what you say to him. Lead him on gently to what you would have him be." "Can love be other than exacting?", he asks, "or loyalty refrain from admonition?"<sup>1</sup> But friendship was such a tender plant, it must be gently handled, or it would fade away. "Importunity between friends results in estrangement."<sup>2</sup> After telling a disciple to lead on his friend to that which he lacked,<sup>3</sup> Confucius as it were draws back, and says, "If you find you cannot do that, stop. Do not quarrel with him only to get insulted." Confucius' teaching on the subject evidently made a deep impression on his followers, for one of them afterwards summed up the whole matter in the words, "The wise man by his culture gathers his friends and by his friends develops his goodness of character."<sup>4</sup>

On the subject of Education, Confucius had much to say. As one who was to his life's end a student, and who was at the same time a born teacher, he had a wide practical and theoretical knowledge of that of which he spoke, and his wisdom is never seen to better advantage than in his remarks on the subject. He was enthusiastic in his praise of a student's life. "Is it not indeed a pleasure to acquire knowledge and constantly to exercise oneself

---

1. 14,8.

2. 4,26.

3. 12,23. (Ku Hung-Ming.)

4. 12,24.

therein?"<sup>1</sup> Until one takes delight in study, one has not reached the goal of a student's life. "He who knows the Truth is not equal to him who loves it, and he who loves it is not equal to him who delights in it."<sup>2</sup> But this delight in Truth is not easily won. The student must first undergo a discipline of spirit, which time and again will cause him pain and sorrow before he finally attains to the real scholar's unperturbed detachment of mind. "The Scholar who in his food does not seek the gratification of his appetite, nor in his dwelling is solicitous of comfort, who is diligent in his work, and guarded in his speech, who associates with the high-principled and thereby rectifies himself - such a one may really be said to love learning."<sup>3</sup> "The Scholar whose regard is his comfort is unworthy to be deemed a Scholar."<sup>4</sup> It is hard enough to be undisturbed by the outward, material surroundings of one's life. It is still harder to gain the mastery of one's own spirit; yet the latter must be acquired if the scholar is to attain his goal. "When in the wrong let him not hesitate to amend"<sup>5</sup>, and let him not be ashamed to seek knowledge from his inferiors.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps the severest test of the real scholar is given in the first chapter of the Analects - "Is not he a true philosopher who, though he be unrecognised of men, cherishes no resentment?"<sup>7</sup>

1. 1,1.

2. 6,18.

3. 1,14.

4. 14,3.

5. 1,8.

6. 5,14.

7. 1,1.

As Confucius gives much thought to describing the temper of mind of the student, so he is at pains to explain what real scholarship means. Intellectual ability implies something much more than a mind stocked with nothing but facts, or a quick wit with no foundation in knowledge. "Learning without thought is useless. Thought without learning is dangerous."<sup>1</sup> "Shall I teach you the meaning of knowledge?" Confucius asks a disciple. "When you know a thing to recognise that you know it, and when you do not know that you do not know - that is knowledge."<sup>2</sup> If a man's education has not taught him the art of easy, happy, sincere relationships with his fellowmen, he does not deserve the name of an educated man.<sup>3</sup> If the 13th chapter of the nineteenth book be genuinely Confucian, it shows how close is the resemblance between the Chinese and Greek view of the relationship between the student's and the statesman's life:- "The occupant of office when his duties are finished should betake himself to study; and the student when his studies are finished should betake himself to office."<sup>4</sup>

For all his enthusiasm for study, Confucius felt compelled to draw the line at one point, that of irregular speculations.<sup>5</sup> These were 'decidedly harmful'. To his students he

---

1. 2,15. It is interesting to compare this with the Jewish proverb, "First learn, then form opinions." Shab.63a. Rabbinsche Blumlese 434.

2. 2,17.

3. 13,28.

4. 19,13.

5. 2,16.

had wise words to say on the art of studying, "Learn as if you were not reaching your goal, and as though you were ~~not~~ afraid of missing it."<sup>1</sup> He specially advocated three subjects for study, poetry, the arts and music,<sup>2</sup> but he realised that all were not ready of able to understand 'higher things'.<sup>3</sup> He had wise words to say on pedagogy. He was conscious of the advantage of individual methods of teaching, as a means of drawing out the ideas in the minds of different students.<sup>4</sup> The teacher must be absolutely impartial, treating every student with respect, regardless of the social position of the student.<sup>5</sup>

More important than what the teacher said or did was what the teacher was. If he were to educate his students aright he must always be a student himself. "He who keeps on reviewing his old and acquiring new knowledge may become a teacher of others."<sup>6</sup> He must be worthy of his profession, balanced and poised alike in outward action and inner spirit.. "A Scholar who is not grave will not inspire respect, and his learning will

1. 8,17.

2. 8,8. "In education sentiment is called out by the study of poetry; judgment is formed by the study of the arts; and education of the character is completed by the study of music."  
(Ku Hung-Ming.)

3. 6,19. "To those who are below the average one may not discourse on higher things."

4. 11,25. , which shows him using this method.

5. 15,38. "In teaching there should be no class distinctions."

6. 2,11.

therefore lack stability. His chief principles should be conscientiousness and sincerity."<sup>1</sup>

Regarding music as an essential part of life, Confucius naturally has much to say of it in its educational bearing. Like Plato, he believed profoundly in its educative and moral influence. "If a man is without moral character, what good can the use of music do him?"<sup>2</sup> According to him, there was a real connection between good music and good character, between bad music and bad character. There was, moreover, a type of music which might satisfy the canons of musical art, but which failed to fulfil its function as a moral influence.<sup>3</sup> So great was the force of music that its use and dissemination formed an integral part of the work of government, while its misuse resulted in a general deterioration. "When proprieties and music do not flourish, punishments will not be properly awarded."<sup>4</sup>

In part, doubtless, Confucius' emphasis on music was the product of his educational theory and practice. Music taught precision, patience, appreciation, balance, as well as

1. 1,8.

2. 3,3.

3. e.g. the Wu type, whereas the Shao was perfectly good both in form and influence. (3,25) The songs of Cheng were to be banished. (15,10) It will be remembered that in the 3rd book of the Republic, Socrates advocated the banishment of Lydian and Phrygian harmonies, since these unnerved people, and made for drunkenness, softness and indolence. The Dorian and Phrygian harmonies, on the other hand, were to be encouraged, since they developed courage and temperance.

4. 13,3. Legge's trans.

physical aptitude and aural sensibility. There was, however, a deeper reason for his insistence on the importance of music. His whole thinking, whether it concerned itself with the individual, the family or the state, was permeated with the conviction that there was the closest relationship between outward act and inward spirit. The balanced intervals, the rhythmic periods, the emotional atmosphere of music influenced the inner harmony of a man's spirit, while a person who was perfectly adjusted to life would find natural and easy expression of himself in music.<sup>1</sup>

"Forms and ceremonials are not merely custom and practice", says Wilhelm, "but they are the correct expression of a corresponding inner attitude. All forms without the basic truth of inner attitude are empty and despicable. For Confucius, indeed, this inner attitude transcends in importance the perfection of external form...Correct form is, therefore, something which, in its very fundamentals, is artistic. For Confucius, therefore, good manners and music are closely allied. Decorum rules conduct, music rules the emotions. And a harmonious emotion is an ineluctable presupposition for form."<sup>2</sup>

What of Confucius' teaching about the past? His

1. What he preached he practised. After hearing "a certain piece of ancient music (the oldest then known in China)..he gave himself up to the study of it for three months, to the entire neglect of his ordinary food. He was then heard to say, "I should never have thought that music could be brought to such perfection." (7,13; Ku Hung-Ming.) 7,31 is also significant. Sse-Ma Ch'ien tells how Confucius not only collected and edited the ancient songs of the country, but accompanied with the strings and sang the 305 pieces which he selected for the Book of Odes.
2. Confucius and Confucianism. pp.144-145.

attitude to the past, as it is displayed in his conversation, is strangely at variance with the impression created by his life. As an official he was a man of action, so capable and effective in policy and action that he made for himself as many enemies as friends. As a teacher, he seemed a different being. Casting his eyes longingly back to the past, he would fain have his disciples follow the practice of the ancients. He idealised the past, and depreciated the present. "The men of old studied for the sake of self-improvement; the men of the present day study for the approbation of others."<sup>1</sup> "In the arts of civilization our forerunners are esteemed uncultivated, while in those arts, their successors are looked upon as cultured gentlemen. But when I have need of those arts, I follow our forerunners."<sup>2</sup> "High spirit in olden times meant liberty in detail, the high spirit of to-day means utter looseness. Dignity of old meant reserve, dignity to-day means resentment and offence. Simple-mindedness of old meant straightforwardness, simple-mindedness to-day is nothing but a mask for cunning."<sup>3</sup> The reason for Confucius' advocacy of the past is probably partly historical and partly pedagogical. In connection with the former, it certainly was the case that Confucius lived at a time when law, order and good government were at

---

1. 14,25.

2. 11,1. See also 15,10.

3. 17,16. (From one of the doubtful books.)



their nadir, and he had truth on his side when he spoke of better days in the past. <sup>1</sup> There is, however, probably more in his conservatism of attitude than can be explained by the historian's love of the past. Confucius was a man with a mission, a thinker endowed with a deep sense of vocation. The circumstances of his life had rendered it impossible for him to work out his vocation in the realm of government. He was, accordingly, compelled to deliver his message by means of his teaching and writings. But who was he to lay down the rules of government, the standards of national and political life? Simply, 'the man from Chou'. <sup>2</sup> He could boast neither the blood of the 'Son of Heaven', nor (except for a short time) the position of an honoured government official, and without these he had no authority whatsoever. His whole philosophy, alike of government, private morality and religion, was derived from the feudal model in which power descended from one ultimate source, flowing down from tier to tier in the hierarchical scale. If one occupied no position in that hierarchy, one's power was non-existent. Inner message and outward sanction or authority went together. Confucius had the former, but not the latter.

- 
1. For the thought that follows the writer is indebted to Wilhelm who works out this idea in his Confucius and Confucianism.
  2. This does not mean that he was of peasant class. He "belonged to the upper class of Chinese society, or the nobility .... Confucius himself was descended from a line of minor nobles which traced its origin to the rulers of the Yin dynasty, a fact which the sage never forgot." (The Origin and Development of the State Cult of Confucius. John K. Shryeck. p.1.)

What then? The authority that he failed to obtain from contemporary life, he must obtain from the rulers and great men of past days. "This is the probable reason why, as K'ang Yu-wei has quite convincingly shown, he supported his ideas of reform by giving them out, not as his own ideas, but by surrounding them with the authority of the greatest antiquity and of its wisest rulers. This was the reason why he 'only transmitted and did not create'.<sup>1</sup>" As the priestly writers of the Jewish world enhanced the efficacy and appeal of their teaching by buttressing it with the authority of Moses,<sup>2</sup> so Confucius appealed to the rulers of ancient times. In both cases, the backward looking glance was the result, paradoxically enough, of a mind intent on the needs of the present and future. Hebrew priest and Chinese sage both saw that the circumstances of the day required drastic treatment. The remedies required, however, would be unpalatable and ungongenial to the taste of those who required them most. The treatment, therefore, would be much more likely to be effective if it could be surrounded with the authority and kudos of antiquity.

To summarise: the Analects, a short book of four hundred and ninety-nine verses, covers a wide range. Containing the sayings of a man who was alike a philosopher, a teacher, and a government official, the book gives expression to high and noble

---

1. Confucius and Confucianism. R. Wilhelm. p. 98.

2. e.g. 7,14; specially 8,18,19,20,21, with their praise of Shun and Yu; 15,4.

ideals of character, while at the same time it is in close touch with the problems of life as it is lived on the low and dusty levels of the everyday world. Its main interest is Virtue. Again and again, reference is made to the spirit, temper and conduct of the virtuous man. Possessing a high view of human nature, Confucius was also well aware of the liability of man's moral life to deteriorate. He believed strongly in the formative influence of environment. In his religious utterances he was reticent; he had little or nothing to say about the way in which Divine power could penetrate and strengthen a man's moral nature, but he was emphatically of opinion that Heaven was on the side of those who aimed at Virtue. He often spoke on the theory and practice of government - subjects that lay very near to his heart; to him government stood for something much more than legislation or administration. Fundamentally, it was akin to education, in the widest and deepest sense of the word. Its goal was nothing less than the permeation of a whole people with the spirit of Virtue. The intimate and personal relationships of life also deeply interested Confucius - the relation of friend and friend, parent and child, teacher and pupil. He had valuable hints to give the student. For music he had a great enthusiasm.

From the variety of his interests it is comparatively easy to gain some idea of the all-round nature of his outlook. Far more important, however, is the influence that his viewpoint

has had in determining the standards of taste, the ideals and the practices of untold numbers of his countrymen for over two thousand years. "He has been a model and inspiration to the scholars and thinkers of his nation for 2,400 years. He represents fundamental positions in philosophy and ethics. His own character was such that one cannot read the story of his life and of his conversation with his disciples without coming to love him. Confucius richly deserves the words which often appear above his altar, 'The teacher of ten thousand generations'<sup>1</sup>"

---

1. The Origin and Development of the State Cult of Confucius.  
John Shryock. p. 233.

CHAPTER 6.

A CRITICAL APPRECIATION OF THE  
ANALECTS OF CONFUCIUS.

---

## CHAPTER 6.

## A CRITICAL APPRECIATION of the ANALECTS of CONFUCIUS.

The Lun Yü is not an easy book to appraise. Its merits tend to hide themselves, while the peculiar format of the book discourages criticism of its weak points. When one sets out to look for its outstanding qualities, one searches in vain for anything corresponding to the literary beauty of the eulogy of Wisdom in the eighth chapter of Proverbs, or to the religious warmth of the Psalter. There is in it nothing analagous to the profundity of thought of Plato's Republic, or to the metaphysical subtleties of the Buddhist classics. Instead of these, one finds little more than an unsystematic assortment of ethical maxims, very wise and high-toned, but a trifle pedestrian and dull.

On the other hand, criticism is equally difficult. It is disarmed by the simple sincerity of the book, and its continuous, humble striving after the best. Moreover, the particular form of the Analects makes one still more disinclined to adopt the rôle of critic. How can one criticise a man's table-talk, especially talk that is reported in all probability at second-hand? It is one thing to criticise a book into which a thinker has put the sustained thought of a life-time; it is a very different matter to sit in

judgment on the casual, fleeting remarks that he makes to his disciples. How is one to know that his students have remembered his words aright? If there be strange and unfortunate omissions in his teaching, may that not be due to the fact that pregnant words of his have disappeared, because they touched no nerve of understanding in the hearts of those who heard them?

Questions such as these are not so difficult to answer as appear at first sight. Historical evidence on the subject of Confucius' disciples is abundant, and it is unlikely that men who revered their Master as they did, and who were trained by him in the highest standards of exact scholarship known to the time - it is unlikely that such men would be lacking in care as they co-operated in the all-important work of transmitting his words to future generations. Again, there is full evidence that Confucius was a skilled teacher, an adept at adapting his message to the peculiar needs of each student, and it would be strange if a born teacher such as he, failed to get the inner heart of his thought across to his pupils.

While a student of the Analects must always keep in mind that it is the sayings of Confucius that are under discussion, he must also remember that the Master's table-talk has become a classic, an educational text-book that has been in use for over two thousand years. The Lun Yü, therefore, cannot be judged only for what it is in itself. Its influence on the innumerable multitudes who have studied and prized it, must be taken into account. The positive truths it inculcates have been recognized and appreciated generation

after generation; its weaknesses have become the weaknesses of countless numbers; what it ignores has been ignored or sought for in other less healthy sources by the spiritual descendants of Confucius.

One of the facts of which the Analects makes little mention is that of evil. The book is full of statements like these - "To see the right and not do it is cowardice";<sup>1</sup> "Virtue is the denial of self and response to what is right and proper ... If not right and proper do not look, if not right and proper do not listen, if not right and proper do not speak, if not right and proper do not move";<sup>2</sup> "Fix your mind on the right way; hold fast to it in your moral character; follow it up in kindness to others; take your recreation in the polite arts"<sup>3</sup> - and always the inference is that a man, if he will, can live up to the suggested standard. The fact remains, however, that men do not, as Confucius well knew. The circumstances of his life and the times in which he lived, made the reality of evil only too patent a fact, dragging kings from their duty, and plunging states into a welter of chaos. In his own personal life, Confucius seems to have been as successful as most in curbing the power of evil. But he neither knew how to treat it as a philosopher, nor as an ethical teacher was he able to show others how to overcome it. "Man is born for uprightness",<sup>4</sup> he said, but he did not attempt to solve the problem of how, although this was so,

---

1. 2, 24.  
 2. 12, 1  
 3. 7, 6  
 4. 6, 17.



really good men were impossible to find.<sup>1</sup> He knew, as well as any, how painfully easy it was to have one's gaze deflected from the goal, but the only cure he could give was to reiterate his suggestion of aiming at Virtue, and of scrutinizing relentlessly one's aims and motives. A problem does not cease to be a problem, however, by being ignored, and the praiseworthy optimism of his ethical philosophy might be accused of gaining its confidence of spirit at the expense of a comprehensive view of all the factors to be considered.<sup>2</sup>

The same weakness pursues Confucius when he passes from the ethics of individual life to the ethics of society. His political philosophy suffers from the same error, the minimising of the force of evil. He builds up his conception of the State on the basis of the rule of the virtuous, but he gives little or no guidance as to the line to be taken if and when the seats of the mighty are occupied by evil men.

1. "A really good man it is not mine to see. Could I see a man of constant purpose I would be content." 7, 25.
2. Albert Schweitzer in his "Christianity and the Religions of the World" has an interesting note on this. Speaking of the 'vital experience' it was for him to become acquainted with the religious thinkers of China, he shows how "they are much nearer to us than the Indian philosophers, for they do not move in an atmosphere of arrogant negation of life and world, but are battling with philosophy, therein to attain to really ethical piety". Then he goes on - "As regards one thing, however, the religion of China is as far removed from us as that of India; it attempts to be unified, self-contained logical knowledge of the world. In so far as the Chinese philosophers are ethical, they idealize the natural forces at work in the world, and ascribe to them ethical character ... Slaves of their monism, they run after an illusion - as if religion could justify itself on the basis of 'knowledge of the world'.... We (Christians) are far more deeply conscious of what sin is, than are the religious minds of China .... To the religious minds of China we say: 'Religion is more than ethical optimism'" pp.59-61.


As Confucius failed to sound the depths of the evil in men's hearts, so did he fail to describe adequately the heights of virtue to which he consistently summoned his followers. Sometimes the altitude is not conspicuously high. On one occasion he stated that the constituent elements of Virtue were respect, magnanimity, sincerity, earnestness, and kindness.<sup>1</sup> It is an exemplary list, though a somewhat sober one, but its value is decidedly lessened by the reasons he gives for practising these. "With respect you will avoid insult, with magnanimity you will win all, with sincerity men will trust you, with earnestness you will have success, and with kindness you will be well fitted to command others."<sup>2</sup> On another occasion, when asked about Virtue, he replied, "The man of Virtue puts duty first, however difficult, and makes what he will gain thereby an after-consideration, - and this may be called Virtue."<sup>3</sup> If this is a statement about one aspect of Virtue, no possible exception can be taken to it, but if it is supposed to be a comprehensive definition, Virtue is by no means so rich and many-sided a quality as it is usually held to be. Sometimes the attention that might more healthily be expended on the effort to reach the goal, is turned inwards in minute introspection. "I daily examine myself on three points", said one of the Master's most famous disciples - "In planning for others have I failed in conscientiousness? In intercourse with friends have I been insincere? And have I failed to practise what I have been taught?"<sup>3</sup> On occasion, it is true, the definitions he

---

1. 17, 6. (This is in the less reliable section of the Analects.)

2. 6, 20.

3. 1, 4.

gives of Virtue could not be bettered, as in his laconic answer to Fan Ch'ih,  "Love your fellow-men".<sup>1</sup> He is so certain of the inherent worth of Virtue, that he insists that for it the virtuous man will be willing to lay down his life. "The resolute scholar, and the virtuous man will not seek life at the expense of Virtue. Some even sacrifice their lives to crown their Virtue."<sup>2</sup> On the whole, however, his descriptions of Virtue lack the glow and warmth that one would imagine to be necessary, if the Virtue depicted is to be considered a greater prize than life itself.

Why should man aim at Virtue? To this question Confucius gives no clear answer. The lack of definiteness in his teaching on this point has led students of his writings to curiously different conclusions. "The moral teaching of Confucius", says Giles, "is absolutely the purest and least open to the charge of selfishness of any in the world.... 'Virtue for virtue's sake' is the maxim which if not enunciated by him in so many words, was evidently the cornerstone of his ethics and the mainspring of his own career.... Virtue resting on anything but its own basis would not have seemed to him virtue in the true sense at all, but simply another name for prudence, foresight, or cunning".<sup>3</sup> De Groot's appraisal of Confucius' ethic is of a different character. "The great thing which strikes us in this Confucian religion and its popular outgrowth is its thorough materialistic selfishness. Promotion of the material happiness of

---

1. 12, 22.

2. 15, 8.

3. The Sayings of Confucius. Leonard Lyall. Introduction by Giles. p.12.

the world is its aim and end."<sup>1</sup> The truth lies somewhere between the two positions. If anything, the balance is on the side of Giles, though one would draw the line at his superlatives, when he speaks of Confucius' moral teaching as "absolutely the purest and least open to the charge of selfishness of any in the world." With regard to De Groot's reading of the situation, one would admit that Confucius does give practical and this-worldly reasons for the pursuit of Virtue. But can one call rewards such as the good-will of 'barbarians', the esteem of honest men, the approval of parents, materialistic and selfish? There is surely little to cavil at in such teaching, especially as it is accompanied by the view that Virtue is to be pursued for its own sake, regardless of the consequence.<sup>2</sup>

The various weak points that have been mentioned - failure to see evil as it is and to provide counsels for its conquest, lack of a forceful conception of Virtue, and weakness of touch in making plain why Virtue is the goal-all these can be traced down to one root, the vagueness of Confucius' conception of God. He believed in God, as has been shown.<sup>3</sup> He held that T'ien was a personal, righteous Being, with whom man could co-operate, and in harmony with whose moral laws man should govern his life. From his study of the Book of Poetry, Confucius would know of the growth of scepticism among the poets, who were abandoning the trustful faith of earlier days for a severely critical attitude of Heaven.<sup>4</sup> Of this temper of thought

1. The Religion of the Chinese. J.J.M. De Groot. p.131.

2. e.g. "He upon whom a moral duty devolves should not give way even to his Master". 15, 35.

3. See pp. 207-214 of thesis.

4. See pp. 67 of thesis.

there is not a trace in the Analects, which is marked throughout by a simple belief in Heaven, and the whole-hearted acceptance of its will.<sup>1</sup> At a time when superstition was increasing, and the pantheon of spirits was becoming more and more peopled with inferior deities, Confucius concentrates on the purer religion of earlier days. Of his remarks on religion, the great majority turn round the central fact of Heaven.<sup>2</sup> When he speaks about worship of the ancestral spirits, he is emphatic that while all ceremonies connected therewith must be performed with the utmost individual and corporate reverence, yet the less dogmatism and certitude there is on the subject of the spirits, the better. "When Chi Lu asked about his duty to the spirits the Master replied: "While still unable to do your duty to the living, how can you do your duty to the dead?"<sup>3</sup> At the same time, he himself was scrupulously careful, not only to participate himself in the customary ancestral rites, but to worship with his whole heart and soul, as if the spirits of his forefathers were actually present.<sup>4</sup> He did not limit his religious observances to public ceremonies; he observed the customary rites within the secluded precincts of the home. "Although he might have the plainest fare on the table, he would always say grace before he ate".<sup>5</sup> When describing the flawless

---

1. See pp. 208-210 of thesis.

2. See pp. 208-210 of thesis.

3. 11, 11. Quoted on p. 211 of thesis.

4. 3, 12.

5. 10, 8. Ku Hung-Ming's translation, to which he appends this note - "An ancient Custom in China equivalent in meaning but not exactly the same as the 'saying grace' in Europe.... The saying grace consists in setting aside a very small portion of the rice or meat on the table and offering it to the Powers". p. 79.

character of an ancient Emperor, he picked out for special mention the fact that "he was unsparing in his filial offerings to the spirits"<sup>1</sup>

It must be confessed, however, that in his teaching about the spirits, Confucius was more concerned to show his fellow-countrymen the impossibility of sure knowledge than to satisfy their instinctive curiosity regarding the life of those to whose spirits they regularly offered sacrifice. And it must be admitted that the Heaven of which he speaks is a somewhat vague and colourless conception. In certain respects it is not unlike a magnified king. It is wise and great; it knows and protects its subjects; it bestows and withdraws its gifts; it has its laws. Above all, it is righteous.<sup>2</sup> But the lines are faintly drawn. If the conception of Heaven as a king is not fully worked out, still less is the thought of Heaven as a father. Naturally, there is a lack of warmth and vividness in the portrait. "Knowing God only as a Majesty and never as a Father, the spring of his<sup>3</sup> affections could not bubble joyously forth".<sup>4</sup>

On the subject of prayer, Confucius made two all-important remarks, which throw a flood of light on his attitude to the subject. He realized that there was the closest connection between prayer and morality. Prayer could not live in the presence of evil. "He who sins against Heaven", he said, "has no where left for prayer."<sup>5</sup> On another occasion, he showed that prayer was to him something more than

---

1. 8, 21.

2. See pp. 208-210 of thesis.

3. i.e. 'man's'

4. The Three Religions of China. W.E.Soothill. p.31.

5. 3, 13. Quoted on p.210 of thesis.

an intellectual theory; it was a practical habit, a vital part of his whole life. "My praying has been for long", he told a disciple, or, as Ku Hung-Ming has it, "My prayer has been a long, life-long one". With the conception he held of Heaven, however, prayer to him could hardly be a real communion of the Divine and human spirit; when it was not simply a formal ceremonial act, it seemed rather to be a constant reverent attitude of mind.

Even when the limitations of his religious outlook are fully admitted, the fact remains that his contribution to the religious thought of his time was no mean one. He linked ethics with religion, and saw the practice of morality against the background of eternity. He had a firm grasp of one or two great central facts. In view of the strength of his hold, however, it is to be regretted that he did not make more use of the truth in his possession. "While republishing the message he received from the ancients, he failed to develop it as we can now see it might have been developed. He failed to emphasise the personality of that Being whose messenger he believed himself to be. By his use of the already prevalent term Thien he may even have helped unconsciously to bring the idea of the Divine down to that of an impersonal power making for righteousness. He failed also to develop what intimations he had in the Classics and in his own experience of a gracious relation between this righteous God and individual men. In reaction from the political disorder of his time he may have laid too much stress on the

external and statutory side of his ideal, and so have tended to make the righteousness he sought a slavish bondage to an ancient tradition rather than a free response to a present God."<sup>1</sup>

In this chapter mention has been made so far only of Confucius' general ethical and religious outlook. What of the details of his ethical system? Is he consistent throughout? Despite his explicit injunctions to "love your fellow-men"<sup>2</sup> and his command "Do not do to others what you would not like yourself",<sup>3</sup> there are occasions when he forgets to rise to the level of his own teaching. When a man sees an unfortunate person at the bottom of a well, he should certainly not plunge into the well to the rescue, until he has satisfied himself that such a course of action is necessary.<sup>4</sup>

With regard to the Master's enunciation of the Golden Rule in negative form, two points should be noted. It is usual for Western scholars to admire on the negative form of his precept, and to compare it, to its detriment, with the command as laid down in New Testament Scripture. With this point of view, however, one sinologue has little sympathy. Giles maintains that since a man would not desire to be treated in a manner that showed lack of love or thoughtfulness or sympathy, he himself will display these positive qualities in his relations with others. Therefore, so Giles argues, the Chinese maxim is, to all intents and purposes, closely similar

1. Chinese Religious Ideas. P. J. MacLagan, p.42.

2. 12, 22. Quoted on p. 243 of thesis.

3. 15, 23.

4. "Tsai Wo asked, saying: 'An altruist, even if some one said to him, 'There is a man in the well', would, I suppose go in after him?' 'Why should he act like that?' answered the Master. 'The higher type of man might hasten to the well, but not precipitate himself into it; he might be imposed upon, but not utterly hoodwinked.'" 6, 24.



to the Jewish-Christian one. This is true in logic: it is not true in psychology. It is a commonplace of educational practice that there is all the difference between the command, "Do not", and the command, "Do". The latter focuses the mind on the positive action to be taken, whereas the former concentrates attention on the forbidden act, and fails to provide a positive image to take the place of the vetoed concept. In view of this, one cannot but maintain that, edifying and high-toned as are Confucius' words, they are not so rich in ethical content or in psychological force, as they would have been had they been cast in positive form.

As there is a lack of positive warmth about the maxim which Confucius lays down for the guidance of man in his relations with his fellows, so when he discusses the question of the treatment of enemies does he fall short of the high creative insight of some of the thinkers of his time. When someone asked him, "What do you think about the principle of rewarding enmity with kindness?" he replied, "With what, then, would you reward kindness? Reward enmity with just treatment, and kindness with kindness".<sup>1</sup>

The precept "Do not do to others what you would not like yourself" would seem to imply a scrupulous regard for truth in speech. Confucius has been accused of twice lowering the standard of veracity. According to the Analects, he commended a chivalrous character of the time, saying, "He was a man who never would boast. On one occasion, when the troops among whom he was, took to flight, he slowly brought up the rear; and when they had approached the

---

1. 14, 36.

city gate to which they were retreating, he whipped his horse and was the last man to enter the gate, remarking simply, 'It was not courage which kept me behind. But you see - my horse would not go'.<sup>1</sup> Another time, Confucius seems to depart still further from a strict regard for truth. A certain visitor was anxious to see Confucius, who had no desire whatsoever to meet him. His servant, therefore, was instructed to inform the unwanted visitor that the Master was ill, 'but when his messenger had gone out at the door, he took up his harpsichord and began to sing, so that Ju Pai might hear it'.<sup>2</sup> Those who would on the basis of these two instances accuse Confucius of a lack of appreciation of truthfulness, are men of a hyper-critical cast of mind. As R. F. Johnston points out in his "Lion and Dragon in Northern China", the point of the first story lies not in the truthfulness or untruthfulness of the general, but in Confucius' appreciation of his modesty, the only comment of the Master on the incident being, "Meng Chih-fan is no boaster".<sup>3</sup> In the second case (found in the less reliable section of the Analects) it is explicitly stated that Confucius took pains by his singing and playing to let the visitor know that he was perfectly well, thus by his actions effectively negating the significance of his words. Moreover, any discussion on verbal exactitude must keep in mind that the East

---

1. 6, 13. (Ku Hung-Ming's translation).

2. 17, 20.

3. 6, 13.

does not accord to this matter the ethical significance given it by the West.<sup>1</sup>

In popular thought the Confucian ethic is closely connected with filial piety. As a matter of fact, the subject occupies less space in the Analects than one would expect. There is much that is praiseworthy in the sage's point of view on the question, for example, his emphasis on the necessity for a son's service of his parents to be a service of the heart and not mere lip-service.<sup>2</sup> Confucius is right in holding that a man who has not learnt to be a good son will not make a good citizen. Unselfishness, discipline and obedience must first be practised in the small sphere before they can be exercised in the large. "He who aspires to become a sage must humble himself, and begin by scrupulously performing all those duties and obligations which are incumbent upon even the most ordinary of mortals. Amongst these duties and obligations, the exercise of filial piety is the greatest."<sup>3</sup> "Are not filial devotion and respect for elders the very foundation

1. The East, on the other hand, considers an outburst of anger as a serious moral offence, and regards such with somewhat of the same disapproval as the West gives to a lie.
2. "The duty of a good son nowadays means only to be able to support his parents. But you also keep your dogs and horses alive. If there is no feeling of love and respect, where is the difference? 2, 7". "The difficulty is with the expression of your look. That merely when anything is to be done, the young people do it, and when there is food and wine the old folk are allowed to enjoy it, - do you think that is the whole duty of a good son?" 2, 8. Ku Hung-ming's trans.
3. Words of Confucius quoted in Confucius, the Great Teacher. G. G. Alexander. p.72.

of an unselfish life?"<sup>1</sup> While there are no limits to the devotion and respect a son should feel for his parents, Confucius realizes that there are limits, or at least qualifications, to the extent of the submission of his will. He may 'gently remonstrate with them. If he see that they are not inclined to yield, he should be increasingly respectful but not desist'.<sup>2</sup> If he is to be considered a filial son, he must live in line with his father's wishes for three years after the parent's death. Since nothing is said about what is to be done beyond that period, it looks as if the son may then be allowed to follow his own desires.<sup>3</sup> It must be admitted, however, that the tendency of the filial piety which Confucius inculcated, made for the sacrifice of the younger generation to the older, and for the inhibition of progress, while his emphasis on family loyalty on one instance played havoc with loyalty to a larger group.<sup>4,5</sup>

1. 1, 2.
2. 4, 18. Confucius adds, 'and though they deal hardly with him, he must not complain'.
3. "If for three years a son does not change from his father's ways, he may be called filial." 4, 20.
4. "The Duke of She observed to Confucius: 'In my part of the country there is a man so honest that when his father appropriated a sheep he bore witness to it'. 'The honest in my part of the country,' replied Confucius, 'are different from that, for a father will screen his son, and a son his father, - and there is honesty in that'. 13, 18.
5. It is interesting to note the resemblance between Greek thought and Chinese. Said Epicurus, "Piety is the most sacred species of gratitude. This virtue we are to exercise primarily toward our parents, to whom we are more indebted than all the world beside; for we may owe our education, erudition, etc., to others, but to our parents we owe even ourselves; therefore, if ingratitude to others be hateful, that which is shown to our parents must certainly be most hateful and detestable".

A first reading of the Analects might easily suggest another criticism, that the book voiced the words of a scholar out of touch with life. The Lun Yü, generally speaking, breathes an atmosphere of tranquillity and calm. The storms of battle, the follies of Courts, the outrageous acts of wicked men, the vapourings of fools, all these find little place in its pages. Instead, the emphasis is on the good man's quest for Virtue, the delight of study, the nobility of a life lived in obedience to duty. Here, one feels, are the obiter dicta of a high-principled philosopher, sheltered from the world, leading a life of scholarly detachment, surrounded by reverent disciples. There are, it is true, occasional references to such unhappy things as artful speech, the allurements of female society, an unlicensed observance of a ceremonial rite, or the use of unworthy music; but these might be regarded as the shadows that cross the path of a scholar, and that would be unnoticed by ordinary men, whose whole life was passed in the shade. Still fewer are the references to the sharp, brutal facts that are the concern of the great body of mankind,<sup>1</sup> poverty and war, brigandage and assault. These, however, do not touch the lofty heights on which the philosopher lives, and of these the Analects says little or nothing.

Such is the first impression of calm remoteness which the Analects makes upon one; but it is an impression that has to be

---

1. In an early stage of civilisation, and certainly of China in Confucius' time.

radically revised when the book is read in conjunction with the story of Confucius' life. He knew only too well the meaning of poverty and assault. Civil war and revolution formed the background of the day. He knew by tragic experience the meaning of disloyalty and lip-service to ideals which the heart did not follow. He passed through that most bitter of experiences, to be unwanted by the very rulers whom he longed to serve, and whose countries he knew he could save by the strength and justice of his rule. Viewed against that background, the tranquillity and poise of the Analects are seen in a new light. The lack of petulance and bitterness is remarkable. The steady optimism of the book, its sure conviction that despite all appearances Virtue is worth pursuing, these are noteworthy features of a point of view that has the patience to wait and trust and stand firm, though all be against it. There are criticisms that can with justice be made against the Analects, but that of being the work of a man who was out of touch with the real problems of life is not one of them.

A somewhat analagous line of attack might be made on the grounds that the virtues inculcated in the Analects are those of a particular class or type, the scholar or the government official. There is a certain amount of justification in the charge, but when the whole sweep of the Confucian ethic is taken into account, the criticism is not valid as it appears. The moral system of the

Ju Chiao<sup>1</sup> 子喬 turns round the idea of relationships, the relation of Emperor<sup>天子</sup> and subject, father and son, husband and wife, elder brother and younger brother, friend and friend.<sup>2</sup> In the Analects, Confucius does not specifically mention the 'five relations', but he speaks much of three of them, the relations subsisting between the governor and the governed, parents and children, and friend and friend.<sup>3</sup> It is on the scholar that the main light falls, but it is on the scholar as he conducts himself amid these varied relationships. He is taken as the type or norm; what holds good for him in his capacity of governor, or father or son, or friend, is relevant to the relationships of lesser men. This idea has, to a large extent, been appreciated by the thought of China, every class of the people having been influenced directly or indirectly by the standards of the Lun Yü.<sup>4</sup>

- 
1. The name given in China to Confucianism - literally 'the teaching of the scholar'.
  2. "The theory of 'wu-lun' or 'five relations'...is of very ancient origin.. In the 'Canon of Yao' and the 'Counsels of Kao Yao', and the Book of Records, the term 'wu tien' is used to denote the five relations". The Political Philosophy of Confucianism. L. S. Hsü. p.29.
  3. Confucius makes no mention of the relations of husband and wife.
  4. On this matter of seeing ethics against the background of a man's relationships, there is - as in so many other respects - a real affinity between Chinese and Greek thought. "There is", says Aristotle, "another kind of friendship or love depending upon superiority, e.g. the friendship or love of a father for a son, or any elder person for a younger, or of a husband for a wife, or of a ruler for a subject. These friendships are of different sorts... In each of these there is a different virtue and a different function, and there are different motives; hence the affections and friendships are also different. It follows that the services rendered by each party to the other in these friendships are not the same, nor is it right to expect that they should be the same". Nicomachean Ethics. Book 8, Chap. 8, p. 260. Welldon's trans. While in this passage Aristotle emphasis rather the diversity of Virtue as it is expressed in different relationships, Chinese thought makes more of its unity.

It is an ungrateful task to look for the flaws and blemishes in this two thousand four hundred year old classic, that still has about it something of the hopefulness, idealism and vitality of youth. It is more congenial to look for its strong points. What are they? Undoubtedly its outstanding merit is this, its conviction that goodness matters and matters intensely. The significance of the universe is best seen in the lives of wise and noble men, effective in the world of practical affairs, pure-souled and sincere in the secret places of their own hearts. What a writer in the International Journal of Ethics says of Chinese literature in general is certainly true of the Analects in particular: "In the immense mass of Chinese literature, greater by far than that of any other nation of the past or present, ethical writings form a larger proportion of the whole than is to be found in any other tongue ... questions of human conduct, of civil and social duties and relations have been studied deeply and with the utmost minuteness by them. Not to know, but to behave, has apparently always been the object of their effort.<sup>1</sup>" This strong emphasis on behaviour has prevented Chinese ethics from becoming academic and doctrinaire, while Confucius' insistence on sincerity of motive has done something to keep his teaching from formalism. The important place accorded to the filial virtues of obedience, submission, loyalty and the rest, mitigates the danger

---

1. International Journal of Ethics. Chester Holcombe. Jan. 1908.  
p. 180.



that might arise from a somewhat narrowly utilitarian strain in his ethic,<sup>1</sup> which danger is diminished also by the real though faint background of religion which Confucius provides. In living an ethical life man is not only being true to the laws of his nature, but is living in harmony with a greater force and power, with Heaven itself. Such a conception gives a spaciousness, and a security to Confucius' ethics that otherwise his doctrines would lack. "Behind all is the conception that man's moral nature is bestowed by Heaven, and that the social order, with the obligations attaching thereto, are of divine ordinance. All this is clearly evidenced not only in the pre-Confucian classics, but in the Four Books of the Confucian period."<sup>2</sup>

Another strong feature of the Analects is its grasp of the fact that the Virtue that is not of the inward parts is no virtue at all. Right action and outward conformity to a standard must be the expression of a right spirit. After telling his disciples to observe what a man does, Confucius goes on to say, "Look into his motives; find out in what he rests".<sup>3</sup> Words fail him when he tries to describe the futility of action that has no reality behind it. "High station filled without magnanimity, religious observances performed without reverence, and 'mourning' conducted

- 
1. For this thought the writer is indebted to Suzuki in his 'A Brief History of Early Chinese Philosophy'. p.97. Suzuki also gives ceremonialism, and belief in the spirits as counter-forces to utilitarianism.
  2. The Three Religions of China. W.E. Soothill. p.215.
  3. 2, 10.

without grief, from what standpoint shall I view such ways."<sup>1</sup> It is not the outward circumstances of a man's life that matter, but his inner spirit. "One should not be concerned at lack of position; but should be concerned about what will fit him to occupy it. One should not be concerned at being unknown; he should seek to be worthy of being known."<sup>2</sup> The thing that troubled him was his own inability to get the mainsprings of his life without stain: "Neglect in the cultivation of character, lack of thoroughness in study, incompetency to move towards recognised duty, inability to correct my imperfections, - these are what cause me solicitude."<sup>3,4</sup> If a man did gain the mastery of his own spirit, there would be no limits to his influence for good. "He who governs by his moral excellence may be compared to the Pole-star, which abides in its place, while all the stars bow towards it."<sup>5</sup>

The Analects is remarkable not only for the value of the broad ethical principles on which it is based; it is also noteworthy

1. 3, 26.

2. 4, 14.

3. 7, 3.

4. Here again, in this question of a man's motive, there is close correspondence between Chinese thought and Greek. According to Aristotle, "Actions in accordance with virtue are not for example justly or temperately performed because they are in themselves just or temperate. It is necessary that the agent at the time of performing them should satisfy certain conditions, i.e. in the first instance that he should know what he is doing, secondly that he should deliberately choose to do it and to do it for its own sake, and thirdly that he should do it as an instance of a settled and immutable moral state.... Accordingly deeds are said to be just and temperate, when they are such as a just and temperate person would do, and a just and temperate person is not merely one who does these deeds but one who does them in the spirit of the just and the temperate." *Nicomachean Ethics*. Book 2. Chap. 3.p.42. Welldon's trans.

5. 2, 1.

for a large number of penetrating observations on character, moral self-training, and human nature. "A man's faults", Confucius says, "all conform to his type of mind. Observe his faults and you may know his virtues."<sup>1</sup> Sometimes the remarks he makes show psychological acumen of no mean order, as in this, "When you see a man of worth, think how to rise to his level. When you see an unworthy man, then look within and examine yourself."<sup>2</sup> On occasion it is Confucius the teacher who speaks, with something of the teacher's bluntness, engendered by his extensive knowledge of student nature. Thus when a student tried to excuse himself by saying, "It is not that I have no pleasure in your teaching, Sir, but I am not strong enough", Confucius was quick to retort, "He who is not strong enough gives up half way, but you are drawing the line already."<sup>3</sup> And he was merciless with two former disciples of his whom he felt to be putting on another the responsibility for an unworthy deed, of which they in their hearts approved. "Chiu", he said to one of them, "the man of honour detests those who decline to say plainly that they want a thing, and insist on making excuses in regard thereto."<sup>4</sup> Once, in ten short words, he summed up the difference between the wise man and the fool. "The Wise man is informed in what is right.

---

1. 4, 7.

2. 4, 17.

3. 6, 10.

4. 16, 1. i.e. in the last five books, regarded as less reliable.

The inferior man is informed in what will pay."<sup>1</sup>

於 人 義 喻 君  
利 喻 小 於 子

The wise man's sense of right might lead him to strange places, and enable him to be happy there. When he proposed to go and live among the nine uncivilized tribes of the east, someone interjected, "But they are so uncivilized, how can you do that?" whereupon Confucius replied, "Were a man of noble character to dwell among them, what lack of civilization would there be?"<sup>2</sup> Despite his emphasis on abstractions like Virtue and Wisdom, he was certain that man was greater than any abstract conception. "A man can enlarge his principles; it is not his principles that enlarge the man."<sup>3</sup> On an earlier page<sup>4</sup> the relative weakness of his maxim, "Do not to others what you would not like yourself," was pointed out, but if the precept be regarded simply by itself, its value is by no means inconsiderable. According to Legge, it marks his greatest achievement in the inculcation of morality. There is about it a real touch of originality, for it "is not found in its condensed expression in the old classics. The merit of it is his own."<sup>5</sup>

It is worth noting that the unsystematic nature of his teaching, as given in the Analects, is as an ethical force an asset.

- 
1. 4, 16. Ku Hung-Ming translates this, "A wise man sees what is right in a question; a fool, what is advantageous to himself."
  2. 9, 13.
  3. 15, 28.
  4. See p. 248 of thesis.
  5. The Religions of China. J. Legge. p.137.

The lofty maxims that would have been hidden from the man-in-the-street, had they been entombed in some academic text-book, are presented here in short, concise sayings, some of which have become part of the proverbial lore of the people. In a small book of Chinese proverbs,<sup>1</sup> ten were found from the Analects alone - wise words of Confucius that had passed into the current speech of the people :- "Rotten wood cannot be carved;"<sup>2</sup> "Fine words and an insinuating appearance seldom keep company with virtue;"<sup>3</sup> "Learning without thought is labour lost; thought without learning is perilous";<sup>4</sup> "He who is out of office should not meddle with the government";<sup>5</sup> "With coarse food to eat, water to drink, and the bended arm as a pillow happiness may still exist";<sup>6</sup> "Better to be civil to the kitchen god than to the god of the inner sanctum";<sup>7</sup> "They who know the truth are not equal to those who love it, and they who love it are not equal to those who find pleasure in it";<sup>8</sup> "It is harder to be poor without murmuring than to be rich without arrogance";<sup>9</sup> "He who offends against Heaven has none to whom he

---

1. National Proverbs. China.

2. 5, 9. The translations that follow are those given in 'National Proverbs'.

3. 1, 3.

4. 2, 15.

5. 8, 14.

6. 7, 15.

7. 3, 13.

8. 6, 8. Soothills final words are better - 'He who delights in it'

9. 14, 11.

can pray";<sup>1</sup> "Virtue cannot live in solitude; neighbours are sure to grow up around it", or as Soothill more tersely puts it (following as far as possible the six characters of the original, "Virtue never dwells alone; it always has neighbours";<sup>2</sup> "To go beyond (the mark) is as bad as to come short of it".<sup>3</sup>

The Chinese people are peculiarly fond of proverbs. "Every class of society takes delight in the proverb, from the emperor on his throne to the beggar in his hovel. There is no conceivable situation in life for which the proverbial wisdom of the Chinese cannot furnish some apposite citation."<sup>4</sup> That being so, it may safely be said that the concise, epigrammatic form in which Confucius' words are cast, has had the greatest influence alike on the speech of the people and on their point of view on ethical questions.

It is an additional advantage, moreover, that the Analects turns so surely round the spirit and life of one man. There is about the book something of the atmosphere of real life. The inherent truth and power of the Lun Yü are enhanced when there is seen behind the book a man who won the intense love and loyalty of his disciples, who resigned office or refused to accept office in obedience to the voice of conscience, and who spent long years as a homeless exile, searching for the employment he could not find.

---

1. 3, 13.

2. 4, 25.

鄰 有 必 孤 不 德

3. 11, 15.

4. Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics. Article on Proverbs.  
J.A. Kelso. Vol. 10, p. 415.

In the Analects, the Chinese have found something better than 'truth embodied in a tale'; they have found truth embodied in a life, and the embodiment is not altogether an unworthy one. "Confucius was criticised by his contemporaries for 'knowing it is impossible and yet he still tries'".<sup>1</sup> To those of later ages, the criticism has shown the real mettle and spirit of the man. Of him the words might be said which the Master used in describing the nobler type of man, "He first practises what he preaches and afterwards preaches according to his practice".<sup>2</sup>

The Analects ends with a glowing panegyric of Confucius, purporting to come from a devoted disciple. The ardour of its tone is in sharp contrast with the general moderation and sobriety of the book, but even its extravagance is symptomatic of the position that Confucius has held throughout the centuries<sup>3</sup> in China: "The moral and intellectual endowments of other men as compared with those of Confucius are as hillocks and mounds which you may climb over. But Confucius is like the sun and moon. You can never jump over them.

1. Chinese Political Thought. Liang Chi Chao. p.52.

2. 2, 13.

3. The esteem accorded to Confucius for untold years has suffered a sharp decline in the last decade or two. It is the fashion in educated Chinese circles to decri or ignore him, since he has no contribution to make to 'science', the god of most intellectuals today in China. It is more than likely that this point of view will be temporary, and that eventually all that is of lasting value in his ethic will be integrated into the thought of the Chinese Renaissance.

You may break your neck in trying to do it, but the sun and moon will remain as they are.... Confucius cannot be equalled, just as no man can climb up to the sky. If Confucius, our Master, had been born an emperor or a prince, he would then have done those things told of the holy kings of old: 'What he lays down becomes law: what he orders is carried out: whither he beckons, the people follow; wherever his influence is felt, there is peace; while he lives, he lives honoured by the whole world; when he dies he is mourned by the whole world' How is it possible for a man to equal Confucius, our Master!"<sup>1</sup>

---

1. 19, parts of 24 and 25. Ku Hung Ming's trans.



## CHAPTER 7.

### A FINAL COMPARISON OF THE BOOK OF PROVERBS AND THE ANALLECTS OF CONFUCIUS.

---

## CHAPTER 7.

A FINAL COMPARISON OF THE BOOK OF PROVERBS  
AND THE ANALECTS OF CONFUCIUS.

---

In K'ai-fêng, in the province of Honan, there has been found a stone tablet of 1489 A.D., which bears witness to the fact that the Jewish religion had been known and followed in that city since 1163. The inscription which eulogises Abraham and Moses, "winds up with a statement that Judaism differs almost imperceptibly from the religion of the literati, with which it is at one in the inculcation of loyalty to the sovereign, respect for ancestors, obedience to parents and other accepted virtues."<sup>1</sup> The words cannot be taken as an impartial, scientifically detached statement. It was obviously to the interests of these Chinese Jews living in a land that was proud of its own religious heritage to stress the points of resemblance between the faith of their adoption and the faith of their country's rulers. Nevertheless, such a line of argument must have had some foundation in fact, and a detailed comparison of the Hebrew and Chinese classics that are the subject of this thesis provides confirmation of the point of view adumbrated in the Kai-fêng inscription.

---

1. Confucianism and its Rivals. Herbert A. Giles. p.245.

The outstanding feature that Proverbs and the Analects have in common is their closely similar attitude to wisdom and ethics. Hebrew and Chinese are at one in regarding these as closely connected. Writing of the Wisdom of the Jews, Oesterley says, "In the book of Proverbs, and in the Wisdom Literature generally, the Hebrew Chokmah ('wisdom') never means pure knowledge. In its earliest meaning wisdom connoted 'the faculty of distinguishing between what was useful or beneficent, and what was harmful; <sup>1</sup> later, more ethically, between what was good and what was bad.'" This point of view was, if anything, even more pronounced and explicit on the Chinese side. "The moral life," writes Suzuki, "can be said to have been the only philosophical subject which, from the earliest stage of culture to the present day, has seriously interested the Chinese, and which has been considered worthy of their earnest speculation."<sup>2</sup> The subject-matter on which the trained mind of the scholar exercised itself was the ~~seemly~~ conduct of life. The philosopher used his intellectual equipment and mental acumen in discussing, not high problems of metaphysics, but personal and practical questions like these, "In planning for others, have I failed in conscientiousness? In intercourse with friends have I been in- <sup>3</sup> sincere? And have I failed to practise what I have been taught?"

1. The Book of Proverbs. W.O.E. Oesterley. p.59. Introduction.

2. A Brief History of Early Chinese Philosophy. Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki. p. 47.

3. 1,4. Quoted on pp.242, 243 of thesis.

Virtue was no virtue at all, if it did not deepen and widen a man's mind; knowledge was useless if it was not accompanied by strength of character, and if it did not express itself in effective action.<sup>1</sup>

This emphasis in the Analects on the practical side of Wisdom is the more surprising in that Confucius was so markedly a man of scholarly habits, with the scholar's love of the written word, and the scholar's sense of the value of the ancient literature of his land. He would make no claims for his moral habits that others could not make for theirs, but he could not hide his love for the world of thought. "Even in a hamlet of ten houses there must be men as conscientious and sincere as myself, but none as fond of learning as I am."<sup>2</sup> So much did he think of truth that he could say, "He who heard the Truth in the morning might die content in the evening."<sup>3</sup> But truth for him was not something only to be heard; it was to be lived. His teaching, he said, contained one all-pervading principle, and when his disciples waited, eager and intent to have the secret laid bare, they were met by an explanation that was surprising

---

1. Tsü Chang said: "If a man possess virtue without its enlarging him, if he believe in Truth but without steadfastness, how can you tell whether he has these things or not?" 19,2.  
(From the last 5 books.)  
"A man may be able to recite<sup>the</sup> three hundred Odes, but if, when given a post in the administration, he proves to be without practical ability, or when sent anywhere on a mission, he is unable .. to answer a question, although his knowledge is extensive, of what use is it?" 13,5.

2. 5,27.

3. 4,8.

in its simplicity and its practical cast, "Our Master's teaching", Tsêng Tsū said, "is simply this: Conscientiousness to self and consideration for others."<sup>1</sup> Confucius begins a sentence about the wise man, and instead of expatiating about the theoretical goal at which the sage is aiming, he says this, "The Scholar who in his food does not seek the gratification of his appetite, nor in his dwelling is solicitous of comfort, who is diligent in his work, and guarded in his speech, who associates with the high-principled and thereby rectifies himself, - such a one may really be said to love learning";<sup>2</sup> or this, "The student who aims at Wisdom, and yet who is ashamed of shabby clothes and poor food, is not yet worthy to be discoursed with".<sup>3</sup> Mastery of the tools of the study was to Confucius practically synonymous with the spiritual mastery of one's own life and conduct. If ever the situation arose in which one was faced with the dilemma of choice between the world of thought and the world of noble conduct, the former must be regarded as secondary, the latter as primary. "When a youth is at home let him be filial, when abroad respectful to his elders; let him be circumspect and truthful, and while exhibiting a comprehensive love for all men, let him ally himself with the good. Having so acted, if he have energy to spare, let him employ it in polite studies."<sup>4</sup> The world of pure thought was to be entered upon, only if a man 'have energy to spare'.

- 
1. 4, 15
  2. 1, 14
  3. 4, 9
  4. 1, 6.

In essence, the teaching of Proverbs is very similar. "A wise man feareth and departeth from evil"<sup>1</sup>; "A wise son heareth his father's instruction;"<sup>2</sup> "He that gathereth in summer is a wise son".<sup>3</sup> Yet despite the practical and ethical emphasis, the importance of knowledge is not forgotten. "The heart of him that hath understanding seeketh knowledge."<sup>4</sup> His wisdom, moreover, would enable him to express his learning aright.<sup>5</sup> "The wise man's mind makes his speech judicious, and gives permanence to his discourse."<sup>6</sup> To the Hebrew mind, as to the Chinese, Wisdom expressed itself in more effective, more considerate, more beautiful living. Wisdom was mated with ethics, and therefore was justified of her children.

This close resemblance between Proverbs and the Analects in their attitude to ethical and intellectual questions was the more remarkable in that it was by no means universal in the ancient world. Amen-em-ope of Egypt, and the Wise men of Babylon would have sympathised with it; the philosophers of

---

1. 14,16a. 'feareth' - "Not in a religious sense; the meaning is that he exercises caution". (W.O.E. Oesterley. The Book of Proverbs. p. 110.)

2. 13,1a.

3. 10,5a.

4. 15,14a.

5. "The tongue of the wise uttereth knowledge aright" (better, 'dispenses'; Toy. The Book of Proverbs. p. 303) 15,2a.

6. Toy's rendering of 16,23. The R.V. has it, "The heart of the wise instructeth his mouth, And addeth learning to his lips". Moffatt translates it, "Good sense makes men judicious in their talk, it adds persuasiveness to what they say".

Greece would not. Aristotle definitely accorded the higher place to speculative virtue; the philosophy that dealt with the relations of man and his fellows was of a lower order. "If then", he says, "the reason is divine in comparison with the rest of Man's nature, the life which accords with reason will be divine in comparison with human life in general... It would seem too that this is the true self of everyone... It is only in a secondary sense that the life which accords with others, i.e. non-speculative virtue, can be happy; for the activities of such virtue are human, they have no divine element." Aristotle goes on to 'prove' this from the nature of God. "The activity of God being pre-eminently blissful will be speculative, and if so then the human activity which is most nearly related to it will be most capable of happiness."<sup>1</sup> This line of thought would, in a double sense, have been Greek alike to the mind of Palestine and China. There is hardly a statement in it with which Confucius, at least, would have agreed.

It is interesting to speculate on the reason for the practical cast of Hebrew and Chinese thinking. Why is there such a marked contrast between the pronounced ethical emphasis common to both, and, let us say, the metaphysical speculations of India, or the Greek love of thought for thought's sake? To questions such as these, questions that go down to the very

---

1. Nicomachean Ethics. Book 10, Chapters 7-9. Wellston's Translation.

roots of a nation's life, it is impossible to give a categorical answer. All that can be done is to indicate one or two lines of thought, which if pursued to the end, might conceivably give some help in facing the problem.

The peoples both of Palestine and China had a strong sense of the value of life and experience. The world to them was no mere passing show or transitory illusion.; it had meaning and significance. In a sense it was sacramental, a symbol of the spiritual, whether of the spirit of God or of the spirit of man. To the Jewish people with their religious genius, experience presented itself primarily in terms of religious experience. Man's life was of value because of his relation to God. On the plastic wax of his spirit the imprint of God's finger could be seen. The Chinese mind had a much less vivid sense of God, and religion meant less to Confucius and his disciples than to the Wise of Palestine; but the sages of both countries were at one in emphasising the significance of man's spiritual life,<sup>1</sup> and the value of human experience. These ~~mattered~~, the Chinese believed, and hence their absorbed interest in them. In this, perhaps, lies some part of the explanation of such a statement as this of Suzuki: "The moral life can be said to have been the only philosophical subject which, from the earliest stage of culture to the present day, has seriously

---

1. 'Man's spiritual life' in this sentence means the thinking, willing, feeling life of man.



interested the Chinese, and which has been considered worthy of their earnest speculation... It was the avowed object of Confucianism to discard all subtle reasonings about philosophical problems, but to confine itself to human life in its civil, social, and moral bearings."<sup>1</sup> So too did the Hebrews believe in the intense significance of man. They reached this belief by starting from a different point, and by travelling along a different route from the Chinese, but both were at one in seeing amid the quickly passing kaleidoscope of life something of lasting and permanent value.

It is possible too that the special historical circumstances of the time in which the sages of Palestine and China flourished had considerable influence in forming this aspect of their thought. In Hebrew history there came a time when the voice of God was no longer directly and frequently broadcasted to His people through the lips of the prophets. Yet God could not have left Himself without witness. Might it not be - so the writer of the prefatory section of Proverbs may have felt - that God was speaking in different fashion, through the pure-living, ethical lives of the rulers and sages, the farmers and merchants of the land?<sup>2</sup> China too had come to a parting of the ways. The great days of Duke Wen were over. No longer did beneficent rulers, fathers of their people, 'Sons of Heaven' in deed as in name, sit on the imperial throne. The virtue that

---

1. A Brief History of Early Chinese Philosophy. Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki. p. 47. (Quoted also in part on p. 266)  
 2. See pp. 123, 124 of thesis.

no longer occupied the seats of the mighty, must find some other habitat in the nation's life, or dry-rot would spread through the land. "Confucius", says Wilhelm, "stands at a turning-point in Chinese history...He marks that point in Chinese history where the guidance of society passed from the theocratic ruler to the human philosopher."<sup>1</sup> The prius or evoking cause of the teaching of Proverbs and the Analects may have been the empirical need for that practical type of religious and ethical exhortation.

It was not history only as a contemporary phenomenon to be countered or guided or transformed, that interested the Hebrew and Chinese mind. History *quā* history meant much to both peoples, which is another illustration of the important position man occupied in their thinking. Whatever concerned man was regarded as significant by them. If an example be taken from the Jewish side, this is seen in Hebrew Scripture in such a passage as that of 2 Samuel, chapters 15-20, with their account of Absalom's rebellion and the events that followed on it. So detailed is the description, so full of life and colour, that it looks as if it were written by the hand of a contemporary. The name of God is not very often mentioned in these chapters; nor do they contain any moral. The passage is content to give a frank, straight-forward account of the

---

1. Confucius and Confucianism. Richard Wilhelm. pp. 92, 93.

breathless, fateful events of a few days. But it is based on the assumption that the conduct and behaviour and reaction of spirit of a certain man are worth recording. These chapters in 2 Samuel are symptomatic of the Hebrew attitude to history, an attitude which was shared by the Chinese, as their voluminous historical records show. In this respect, Confucius was a true son of his race. If <sup>春</sup> <sub>秋</sub> Ch'un Ch'iu, or Spring and Autumn was composed by him, as is generally believed, it shows the sage's acute sense of the value of historical facts, the book being a most detailed account of the history of his native state of Lu from 740 to 480. This faculty of appreciating the significance of the events of the space time order is a gift that not all Oriental peoples have. It is based on the assumption that man's life is of value, and that human experience is worth recording.<sup>2</sup>

Emphasis on the predominantly practical trend of the thought of Proverbs and the Analects must not be so pronounced

- 
1. In 1926, Ku Chieh-kang, in his Ku Shih Pien, came to the conclusion that Ch'un Ch'iu had never even been seriously read by Confucius. This point of view is very revolutionary, and is not generally accepted. (The Political Philosophy of Confucianism. L.S. Hsu. p. 22.)
  2. In an article in T'oung Pao, 1929, Vol. 26, Homer H. Dubs gives another and less flattering reason for China's pre-occupation with ethics. He makes the suggestion that the Chinese tendency to ignore metaphysics and concentrate on ethics was due to their failure to develop mathematics as a pure science. In Greece, theoretical mathematics had set the norm for philosophy, but no such norm had been established in China. "The result of the absence of mathematical systems was that the Chinese philosophers attacked the world piecemeal."

that it hides entirely the wide, cosmic background against which their respective ethics are set. The great thinkers of Old Testament times are generally charged with lack of a metaphysical sense, and the charge is true in so far as metaphysics is meant nothing more than the insatiable desire of the human mind to subject every concept, every phenomenon, every material fact to the minutest and most searching criticism. If metaphysics be something more positive than that, if it be the endeavour to see life in all its endless variety and multiplicity as a unity, a coherent system, turning round one focal point, then the Hebrews were assuredly not lacking in metaphysical power. The desire to see life steadily and see it whole, to view small and homely concerns against a wide background, to bring isolated maxims into harmony with one constitutive principle, all these are seen clearly in the book of Proverbs. The right conduct of man is shown to be vitally connected with Wisdom, the offspring and attribute of God. God is the one great central fact that linked together all the scattered, practical apothegms of Proverbs. The Hebrew thinker's "primary thought of God explained to him the world, both its existence and the course of events upon it."<sup>1</sup>

Confucian thinking too had a metaphysical background, though much less attention was given to it in the Analects than to the practical requirements of life. In the horizon of

---

1. The Theology of the Old Testament. A.B. Davidson. pp.32,33.

the Master's thought could be seen the conception of a righteous Heaven, in line with whose will man must order his spirit and conduct. The idea, however, was not elaborated by Confucius, and was not worked up into a system of thought. If one wants to find a clear-cut metaphysical background for his ethic, one will find it rather in his doctrine of the Correspondence of Names, as expounded by him in the Analects. When asked what he would do first when he began his official work in a certain state, Confucius replied, "The one thing needed is the correction of terms", and then proceeded to explain his meaning to the astonished disciple. "If names of things are not properly defined, words will not correspond to facts. When words do not correspond to facts, it is impossible to perfect anything.... Therefore a wise and good man can always specify whatever he names; whatever he can specify, he can carry out. A wise and good man makes it a point always to be exact in the words he uses." <sup>1</sup> The theory behind his words is this: the universe is rational. It is a system, the various parts of which fit into one another. Every word is a representation of an object, and ideally word and object should correspond. When they fail to do so, when there is disparity between name and thing, disorganization and confusion are

---

1. 13.3. Ku Hung-Ming's translation. Soppthill has it, "If terms be incorrect, then statements do not accord with facts; and when statements and facts do not accord, then business is not properly executed..Hence whatever a wise man denominates he can always definitely state, and what he so states he can always carry into practise, for the wise man will on no account have anything remiss in his definitions!" See p. 174,175 of thesis for full quotation.

at once set up. To illustrate his meaning Confucius cites the case of a 'ku'. "The 'ku' (a vessel with corners used for sacrificial purposes) no longer has corners ('ku'). What a 'ku'! What a 'ku'!"<sup>1</sup> Or to take a more serious instance: "When asked by an influential minister of his native State about the art of government, Confucius said: 'To rule ('cheng') is to set straight ('cheng'). If you give an upright lead, sir, who will dare walk crooked?' (12,17.) Here the word 政 (government) comes from the word 正 (right, to set aright). A government is that which sets people straight. To say that the present governments which have long forgotten their duty and are no longer capable of performing it, are 'governments', is another example of making<sup>2</sup> a judgment which does not follow the natural sequence of terms."

There are resemblances between the concatenation of ideas and the line of reasoning followed by Plato in the tenth book of the Republic, where Socrates discourses on the 'absolute essential bed' as created by God, and the beds that are made by painter and artificer. On the lips of the Greek philosopher, the discussion has an aesthetic touch which is not so prominent in the Chinese argument, where the emphasis is typically ethical. If there are points of contact between the thinking of Confucius and that of Socrates, there seem at first sight to be none between

1. 6,23. Hu Shih's trans.

2. The Development of the Logical Method in Ancient China. Hu Shih. p. 24.

Chinese and Hebrew metaphysics. It looks as if Wisdom belongs to a totally different category of thought from the theory of the Correspondence of Names. Divine Wisdom certainly does, but there are distinct resemblances between Wisdom as expressed in human lives, and Confucius' doctrine. His theory is no mere intellectual one. The precise definition of terms which he advocates is simply the first step leading on to moral endeavour. Once names have been defined, one is committed to the task of making the world of actual life conform to the ideal meaning of words. To use Confucius' own words, "When the father is father, the son is son, the elder brother is elder brother, the husband is husband, and the wife is wife, then the family is in proper order. When all families are in proper order, all will be right with the world."<sup>1</sup> Seen in this light, the emphasis laid by him on the accurate definition and use of words is not so far removed from the commands of Hebrew Wisdom, since it also leads to practical, moral living.

It would be going too far to say that as both books are alike in the way they link together wisdom and ethics, so they resemble one another in the place they give to religion. Religion forms a real part of Proverbs and the Analects, but whereas it is to the foreground in the former, it is certainly in the background in the latter. In part, however, this may be due to the

---

1. Hu Shih's translation. The Development of the Logical Method in Ancient China. p. 27.

character of the Analects, the table-talk of a man who was reserved on religious matters,<sup>1</sup> who felt that, as a rule, silence was more seemly than dogmatic teaching on points not yet supported by sufficient evidence, and who preferred to express his religion in deeds rather than words. Of the reality of Confucius' religious outlook, the various quotations given in the Lun Yü<sup>2</sup> provide sufficient proof, and Creel is justified in putting the matter as strongly as he does when he says, "It is, in fact, impossible to understand Confucius unless we recognize that for him, as surely as for the priests and prophets of Israel, ethics, politics, and the whole of life were inseparable from their cosmic religious background."<sup>3</sup> Confucius, moreover, as he was careful to point out, was no originator. His concern was rather to conserve and transmit all that was vital in the heritage of old time. One of the palmary conceptions of the ancients was their thought of Shang Ti or T'ien, the Righteous Being Who ruled the world. If Confucius was to be loyal to his cultural inheritance, he must hand on this idea to his successors. His sense of historic loyalty would thus work in with his personal

---

1. "The Master would not discuss prodigies, prowess, lawlessness, or the supernatural." 7,20.

2. See pp. 208-214 of thesis for a full discussion of Confucius' attitude to religion.

3. T'oung Pao. Vol.29, 1932, p.99.



religious attitude,<sup>1</sup> and the result is seen in the Analects with its interweaving of religion and ethics.

In view of the comparative paucity of Confucius' remarks on Heaven, and the innumerable occasions on which he spoke about the moral life, it may be felt that it is an over-statement to speak of the 'interweaving of religion and ethics' in the Lun Yü. It must be remembered, however, that religion to the mind of ancient China was something very different from religion as conceived by the modern Western world. The average Occidental may know theoretically that religion is an integral part of life, but in practice he tends to see them as a duality rather than a unity. The salience of his mind makes it easier for him to see the difference between the sacred and the secular, the supernatural and the natural rather than the nexus that joins the two together. In proportion as he becomes more conscious of the reality and significance of religion, the more he sees it creating and transforming life, but it is as another, transcendent element that it exercises its power. The world of Confucius' time regarded the matter in a totally different way. Krause interprets the viewpoint of the Middle Kingdom thus: "In the ancient Chinese mind the sense of religion is not regarded as an awakening to the knowledge of something different from ordinary thought and life.

---

.1. As seen, for example, in such utterances as, "Heaven begat the virtue that is in me" (7,22); "If I have in any way done wrong, may Heaven reject me!" (6,26); "He who sins against Heaven has nowhere left for prayer" (3,13).

Religious motives are not considered as something distinctive - they lie inconspicuously in the totality of thought and life. Therefore in China religion is so interwoven with the mechanism of life as a whole that the two can never be sorted out or disentangled. Religion is not looked upon as something belonging to a higher sphere - in the sense of something 'numinous' - a something which a man merely fears and worships. It is a constituent part of mundane life, with effects that are directly and everywhere felt.<sup>1</sup> Since religion was regarded in this way, as a natural, essential, and all-pervasive force in life, it was unnecessary to be continually drawing attention to it. When reference, however, was made to the subject, it had all the more significance in that it could be regarded as an outcropping of the rock on which the whole mental and spiritual life of the people was based. When this is realized, one understands better the significance both of Confucius' remarks on the subject of religion, and the comparative paucity of them. What he does say, however, is an impressive tribute to his belief in the importance of righteous living, since only by an ethical life, nobly lived, can one be in harmony with the Spirit that rules the world.

Despite Confucius' belief in T'ien, it is impossible to deny that there is an agnostic note in his religious teaching,

---

1. The Chinese Religion. F.F.A.Krause, in Carl Clemen's Religions of the World, Their Nature and Their History. p.78.

as his reluctance to discuss the supernatural shows.<sup>1</sup> Such a note is also sounded in Proverbs. The book that contains the lyrical rhapsody of Wisdom as given in chapter 8, and the simple belief in a personal righteous God as expressed in many of the 'meshalim', also gives voice to the words of Agur, the doubter, critical of the possibility of knowing much about God. Whether verses 2-4 of chapter 30 are to be taken ironically or as an honest expression of humility, they show the contrast between God's greatness and man's littleness, and the folly of the infinitely small trying to comprehend and understand the infinitely great.

'Surely I am more brutish than any man,  
And have not the understanding of a man:  
And I have not learned wisdom,  
Neither have I the knowledge of the Holy One.  
Who hath ascended up into heaven, and descended?  
Who hath gathered the wind in his fists?  
Who hath bound the waters in his garment?  
Who hath established all the ends of the earth?  
What is his name, and what is his son's name, if thou  
knowest?' 2

The third verse, which Moffatt translates,

'I am no master of thought,  
Of the Deity I know nought",

goes further in an agnostic direction than does Confucius, who certainly gives the impression of knowing something at least of

1. 7,20. See also 6,20; 11,11, and pp. 211-213 of thesis, where the question of Confucius' agnosticism is discussed. It should be noted, in addition, that the subjects on which Confucius is reserved or agnostic are 'the spirits' or 'the dead', and not T'ien.

2. 30,2-4.

the mind and character of the Heaven of which he speaks. For the most part, however, both the Wise men of Proverbs and the Master of the Analects show their wisdom in looking for God, not in the vagaries of wind and cloud and sky, but in the hidden, lowly places of men's hearts and lives.

Their point of view is interestingly similar in another respect, in their distaste for or ignoring of the abnormal and the miraculous.<sup>1</sup> In the Analects this finds explicit expression in the words, "The Master would not discuss prodigies, prowess, lawlessness, or the supernatural",<sup>2</sup> - though as a matter of fact he did discuss the supernatural, if Heaven comes under that category. The silence of Proverbs is even more remarkable in view of the emphasis placed in earlier Hebrew literature on the manifestations of God in storm and fire, in prodigy and miracle. But the Wise of Palestine were at one with Confucius in concentrating their interest on the normal, and in expending their energy on the effort to lift human lives to the highest possible level.

Perhaps it was because of this determination to concentrate on ethics, that so little is said in either book on prayer.

1. The persistence in China of this disinclination for the abnormal is seen in a curious incident reported to have taken place some 1500 years after Confucius' time. When Chu Fu Tzu (b. 1130 B.C.) died, his coffin was said to take up a position in mid-air, about three feet from the ground. The son-in-law of the great commentator, falling on his knees beside the bier, reminded the departed spirit of the great principles of which he had been such a brilliant exponent - and the coffin descended gently to the ground. Thus H. Giles in *Confucianism and Its Rivals*. p. 234.

2. 7.20.

In Proverbs it is mentioned only three times -

'The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord,  
But the prayer of the upright is his delight.' 1

'The Lord is far from the wicked;  
But he heareth the prayer of the righteous.' 2

'He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law,  
Even his prayer is an abomination.' 3

On two occasions Confucius spoke in appreciative terms of prayer.<sup>4</sup>  
It is impossible, however, to deduce much from the comparative  
silence of the two books on the subject, since there was such a  
radical difference between the conceptions held of prayer in Pales-  
tine and in China. In the latter country in ancient times prayer  
seems to have been either an act in some ceremonial rite, or a  
formal announcement to the deity of some important matter, or a  
permanent attitude of mind. Of prayer as the Hebrew psalmist con-  
ceived it, as a sanctifying communion with the Divine, the Chinese  
had little idea. In whatever form it was regarded by the two  
peoples, it was kept in the background by both/<sup>in</sup>their respective  
Wisdom books. One wonders if this was due in both cases to the  
failure to realize the moral influence of prayer, and the part that

1. 15,8.

2. 15,29.

3. 28,9.

4. "He who sins against Heaven has no where left for prayer", 3,13;  
"Once when the Master was seriously ill Tzu Lu asked leave to  
have prayers offered. 'Is there authority for such a step?'  
asked the Master. 'There is', Tzu Lu replied. 'In the litanies  
it is said 'We pray to you, spirits celestial and terrestrial.'  
The Master answered, 'My praying has been for long.'" 7,34.

it could play in the building up of righteous lives.

If there are points of resemblance between the general metaphysical and religious attitude of Hebrew and Chinese Wisdom, there are still closer similarities in their ethical teaching.

The broad basis on which that is established is the belief that a man finds his true self and is disciplined and moralized through his relationships with others. The key-word of the Analects is

仁 'jen', which through its ideographic elements bears witness<sup>1</sup> to the inherently social character of virtue. Proverbs also shows the wise and good man exercising his wisdom and goodness in the give-and-take of social life.<sup>2</sup> The lonely virtues of the detached and secluded Aristotelian scholar find no place in the thinking of the sages of Palestine and China.

In the details of their ethic, their respective points of view show, not infrequently, a marked affinity. Take, for example, the emphasis they both lay on the necessity for reticence and restraint in speech. According to Proverbs, "He that spareth his words hath knowledge",<sup>3</sup> "He that refraineth his lips doeth wisely",<sup>4</sup> and "He that is slow to anger is of great understanding."<sup>5</sup> Confucius strikes the very same note, - "The man of virtue, he is chary of speech",<sup>6</sup> "The slow of speech are not far from Virtue",<sup>7</sup>

1. See pp. 173, 195 and 196 of thesis.

2. " " 93-99 of thesis.

3. 17, 27a.

4. 10, 19b.

5. 14, 29a.

6. An. 12, 3.

7. 13, 27.

and he goes out of his way to correct a disciple who had suggested that the effectiveness of a certain man's virtue was limited by his lack of fluency. "What need has he of ready speech?" said the Master. "The man who is always ready with his tongue to others will often be disliked by them. I do not know about his virtue, but what need has he of ready speech?"<sup>1</sup> If there is any difference at all between the Hebrew and Chinese attitude to the subject, and the difference may be a mere verbal one, it lies in the fact that whereas Proverbs stresses the connection between reticence in speech and wisdom, the Analects shows the former to be linked up with virtue.

On an earlier page,<sup>2</sup> the fact was noted that the quality of courage was practically ignored in Proverbs. Beyond the *māshāl*, "The righteous are bold as a lion",<sup>3</sup> nothing was said in praise of physical or moral courage. If the silence of the Wise signified lack of appreciation, their attitude was not unlike that of Confucius who heavily discounted its value. He would not discuss prowess;<sup>4</sup> he felt that 'love of daring' drove 'men to desperate deeds'.<sup>5</sup> Had he the conduct of an army in a great state, he would not have as colleague the type of man who, bare-armed, would

---

1. 5.4. See also pp. 197 and 198 of thesis. The following quotations are also significant - "The men of old were reserved in speech out of shame lest they come short in deed"(4.22); "The wise man deserves to be slow to speak but quick to act."(4.24.)

2. p.142  
 3. 28.1b.  
 4. 7.20.  
 5. 8.10.

beard a tiger or rush a river, dying without regret. "If I must have a colleague he should be one who on the verge of an encounter would be apprehensive, and who loved strategy and its successful issue."<sup>1</sup> To Confucius the border-line between courage and foolhardiness was very faintly drawn; daring might be but the other side of lack of discretion.<sup>2</sup> "Does a man of the superior class hold courage in estimation?" he was once asked. His answer sums up his point of view of the subject. "Men of the superior class deem rectitude the highest thing. It is men of the superior class, with courage but without rectitude, who rebel. It is men of the lower order, with courage but without rectitude, who become robbers."<sup>3</sup>

If Proverbs and the Analects show little or no enthusiasm for courage, there are certain qualities or states that call forth their glowing eulogy. One of these is friendship. Their point of view on the subject is not unlike that of Greece. The romance that in modern Western lands surrounds the relationship of the sexes and that burgeons out into love, in the ancient world of Greece and Palestine and China turned round the friendship

1. 7,10.

2. "Yu is fonder of daring than I", said Confucius to a disciple; "he also exercises no discretion." 5,6.

3. 17,23 - from the last five and more doubtful books. In line with his general attitude is the following. "I have never seen a man of strong character." Some one remarked, "There is Shen Ch'eng." "Ch'eng!", said the Master, "He is under the influence of his passions, and how can he be possessed of strength of character!" 5,10.



of men. "Greek legend and history", says Lowes Dickinson, "resounds with the praises of friends. Achilles and Patroclus, Pylades and Orestes, Harmodius and Aristogeiton, Solon and Peisistratus, Socrates and Alcibiades, Epaminondas and Pelopidas - these are names that recall at once all that is highest in the achievement and all that is most romantic in the position of Greece. For it was the prerogative of this form of love, in its finer manifestations, that it passed beyond persons to objective ends, linking emotion to action in a life of common danger and toil. Not only, nor primarily, the physical sense was touched, but mainly and in chief the imagination and intellect."<sup>1</sup> Broadly speaking, this is the point of view of Proverbs and the Analects, though the subject is treated in both books with typical sobriety and restraint.

"A friend loveth at all times",<sup>2</sup> say the Wise men of Palestine, and Confucius expresses the same idea on a lower key when he tells of how "Yen P'ing Chung was gifted in the art of friendship. Whatever the lapse of time he maintained towards his friends the same consideration."<sup>3</sup> Both realised that friendship was all the healthier for a little cauterising criticism. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend",<sup>4</sup> says the Hebrew proverb. Confucius, with the ingrained tact and politeness of his race puts the matter more suavely. When asked how one should behave to a friend, he replied,

---

1. The Greek View of Life. H. Lowes Dickinson. pp.168, 169.

2. 17,17a.

3. 5,16.

4. 27,6a.

"Be conscientious in what you say to him. Lead him on gently to what you would have him be."<sup>1</sup> The opening words of the Analects speak very simply of the joy of friendship - "Is it not delightful to have men of kindred spirit<sup>2</sup> come to one from afar?"

On isolated points there is on occasion close resemblance of thought and sometimes even of expression. The sentiment, "Wealth and rank are what men desire, but unless they be obtained on the right way they are not to be possessed",<sup>3</sup> is echoed in more pointed form in Proverbs - "Treasures of wickedness profit nothing".<sup>4</sup> The statement, there is that maketh himself poor, yet hath great wealth"<sup>5</sup> finds concrete illustration in Confucius' description of his favourite disciple, "What a man of worth was Hui! A single bamboo bowl of millet; a single ladle of cabbage soup; living in a mean alley! Others could not have borne his distress, but Hui never abated his cheerfulness. What a worthy man was Hui!"<sup>6</sup> One cannot refrain from pointing out the similarity between a remark of Confucius - "Learning without thought is useless. Thought

1. 12,23. (Ku Hung-Ming's translation.)

2. 1,1. 有朋自遠方來，樂亦不淺。  
Ku Hung-Ming translates 朋 by 'friends of congenial minds'.

3. 4,5.

4. 10,2a.

5. 13,7b. This, as Cesterley points out, may be a description of the miser. "A more likely interpretation, however, and one more in accordance with the mode of the Wisdom writers, is that one man, though poor, is really rich, because he is content with a little and therefore has all he wants." (The Book of Proverbs. p. 100.)

6. 6,9.

without learning is dangerous",<sup>1</sup> and an extra-canonical Jewish proverb, "First learn, then form opinions".<sup>2</sup> The heart of the Master's teaching, as he told a disciple, could be given in the one word, "Sympathy".<sup>3</sup> "Do not do to others what you would not like yourself."<sup>3</sup> It is impossible not to mention that a similar question and answer were given by the Wise men of the later Jewish world. According to the Talmud, Hillel gave to a would-be proselyte who wished to be taught the whole of the Law while he stood on one foot, the reply, "What is hateful to thyself, do not to thy fellow-men".<sup>4</sup>

Above all, the book of Proverbs and the Analects of Confucius are alike in this, in their influence on the life of the Hebrew and Chinese world. Both books are comparatively short, the former containing nine hundred and fifteen verses, the Lun Yü four hundred and ninety-nine.<sup>5</sup> Both books, though polished

1. 2,15.

2. Shab. 63a. Rabbinische Blumlese 434.

3. pp. 248, 249, 260 of thesis.

4. Shab. 31a. Rabbinische Blumlese 223. Cohen in his Ancient Jewish Proverbs points out that this maxim "soon became famous and passed into proverbial use. It was earlier than Hillel, and is found in Tobit 4,14 and in Philo."

5. But many of the verses of the Lun Yü are longer than the verses of Proverbs. (The verses of the Analects are called chapters.) There are some verses, i.e. chapters, in the Analects, on the other hand, that contain only six characters, e.g. 2,12

and refined by scholars, are in essence collections of isolated sayings, rather than systematic studies of great themes; nevertheless, despite this, perhaps because of this, both books have succeeded in winning the affection of their people. The Analects has formed part of the classical literature of China, and has its honoured place as an educational text-book. The influence of Proverbs has been, perhaps, of a less formal kind. It has not been read in the synagogue, and in Jewish schools it has not been studied as systematically as has been the case with the Analects in China. But these facts do not betoken any lack of respect for its teaching. Speaking of Proverbs in general, the Midrāsh Rabbāh to Canticles says, "Let not a proverb be despised in thine eyes, for by means of a proverb one is able to understand the words of the Torah".<sup>1</sup> Unlike the situation in Greece, where the day of the proverb gave way to an elaborate and highly developed metaphysical system, the māshāl in the Jewish world went from strength to strength. The book of Proverbs was the precursor of much Wisdom literature, couched in proverbial form. Proverbs "occur both in Aramaic and in Hebrew, and extend over a period of more than 800 years of Jewish history, from Simon the Righteous (high priest, 310-291 B.C.) down to Rabbi Asher..." The Pirqē Ābhōth "contains the sayings and proverbs of 63 rabbis and teachers arranged chronologically and covering a period of 500 years, from 300 B.C. downwards."<sup>2</sup> If the proverbs of the rabbis held such

---

1. Midr. Cant. l.b. Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics. Vol.10.  
p. 414.

2. Ibid.

an important place, a much higher position would be accorded to proverbs from the Old Testament itself. Above all, Proverbs was, and is, the book of the Jewish home. Week by week its maxims have been taught by Jewish mothers to their children; and every Saturday, as part of the religious ceremonies performed in the course of the family meal, the passage on the virtuous woman has been recited by the male members of the household.<sup>1</sup> In these ways the teaching of Proverbs has entered into the life-blood of the people as the Analects, through the influence of teacher and parent, has played its part in moulding the ideals and conduct of the Chinese people.<sup>2</sup>

While there are many points of similarity in spirit, matter and form between these two representative Wisdom books of Palestine and China, there are naturally many differences as well. The sources from which the books have sprung are different in quality and kind. For the most part the raw material of Proverbs is to be found in the homely sayings of ordinary men, though these sayings have been refined and recast by the sages of

---

1. For this information the writer is indebted to the Rev. Nahum Levison, B.D.

2. The affinity, along certain lines, of the two books can be seen in a practical way in the appeal that the book of Proverbs has for the Chinese mind. It does not strike the Chinese as a strange and foreign work, but as one that is congenial and attractive to them. The writer knows a Chinese whose interest in Christianity was roused by reading Proverbs. She was so impressed with the tone and teaching of the book, that she could not rest until she had come in contact with the faith that had such a book in its collection of sacred writings.

Palestine. The Wise also owed a debt to the Wisdom literature of Egypt and other lands, but the book they produced gives the impression of indebtedness to life rather than to literature. When the meshalim took their final form in the book of Proverbs, they were doubtless very different from the loosely formed, rough and ready proverbs of the street. Yet they could not altogether lose the marks of their origin. In the Analects the very opposite is the case. The book gives the sayings of one of China's greatest thinkers, whose mind, if the word of his disciples is to be believed, far outranged that of his disciples, and whose sayings may possibly have lost something of their sweep and force as they were transmitted by lesser men.

This difference in the origin of the two books may account for the much more extensive use in the Chinese work of literary quotations and historical allusions. There are about forty of these in the Analects. In the first fifteen books, the Shu Ching is referred to thrice,<sup>1</sup> the Shih Ching five times,<sup>2</sup> and the Yi Ching twice.<sup>3</sup> Quotations are not infrequently made from the poets, and there are many references to political events. The book of Proverbs, on the other hand, has not a single definite historical allusion beyond the inscriptions attached to the

---

1. 2.21; 7.17; 14.43.

2. 1.15; 7.17; 8.3; 2.2; 13.5.

3. 7.16; 13.22.

various sections of the collection - 'the proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel';<sup>1</sup> the beginning of chapter ten, 'the proverbs of Solomon';<sup>2</sup> the title that heads the twenty-fifth chapter, "These also are the proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied out"; the words at the beginning of chapter thirty about the mysterious individuals, Agur the son of Jakeh, Ithiel and Ucal, on whose names the textual critics have expended endless thought with but little result for their labours; and the unknown king Lemuel of the thirty-first chapter.<sup>3</sup> Neither are there acknowledged quotations from other literary sources, although too much cannot be made of this fact in view of the debt of the Wise to the Wisdom of Egypt and Babylon. Even when the sapiental influence of other lands is admitted, the fact remains that there is in Proverbs none of the self-conscious, explicit use of quotations from acknowledged literature that is so recurrent a feature in the Analects.

The difference in the use of literary devices has its counterpart in a difference of style. The Analects indulges much less than does Proverbs in vivid metaphors and colourful pictures. The former tends to clothe its thought in general terms, to speak of virtue or sympathy or decorum, while the latter

1. 1.1.

2. The title "is omitted in the Sept. and the Syr." (The Book of Proverbs. W.O.E. Cesterley. p.73.)

3. "The name of Lemuel is otherwise unknown; it is not found in the Sept., and is, in all probability, the result of some corruption in the text." (Ibid., p. 281.)

personifies a virtue or vice, by speaking of the good man or the fool. Whereas the genius of the Hebrew language lies in the cumulative effect of image piled on image, or figure contrasted with figure, the Chinese spirit finds its expression in compression and condensation, in hint or suggestion, rather than broad assertion.

The Analects has had an influence on every section of Chinese society.<sup>1</sup> Its appeal has been wide. It cannot, however, entirely overcome the drawbacks inherent in its origin. It gives the table-talk of a philosopher, the political views of a statesman. The book is remarkably free from academic pre-occupation with pure theory. It shows throughout the strongest interest in the affairs of actual life. Nevertheless, there is in its poise and balance, its conviction that ideals are of greater significance than mundane matters of food and housing and office - in all these one sees signs of the detached spirit of the philosopher. As is natural in the case of a civil servant, the sage's illustrations are mainly drawn from the sphere of government. In all these respects, Proverbs is very different. The book of Hebrew Wisdom represents in large measure the point of view of the average man, strong in his loves and hates. There are no grays or half-tones in his thinking; things are either white or black. A man is either a righteous man, a knave

---

1. See pp. 254, 255 of thesis; also pp. 260-262



or a fool. Whereas in the Analects illustrations are mainly drawn from the political world, Proverbs gives thumb-nail sketches of the rich man and the poor, master and servant, husband and wife, merchant and land-owner. The latter book, accordingly, gives an impression of all-round humanity, of many-sided, full-blooded life, which, on first examination at least, is not felt to be characteristic of the Analects.

If in these respects the Chinese book suffers in comparison with Proverbs, it has, on the other hand, one great advantage in its close connection with one individual. The anonymous book of Proverbs lacks this personal interest. The glimpses given in the Lun Yü of Confucius, his habits, his mode of dealing with different students, his answers to questions, his attitude to the political problems of the day, the intimate disclosures given of his mind<sup>1</sup> and the way he re-acted to circumstances,<sup>2</sup> these give a colour and life to the Analects which the scanty references in Proverbs to 'the Wise' fail to give. The anonymity of the Jewish book says much for the humility of those who compiled it, but it cannot be denied that it places the book at a disadvantage when it is set beside so self-revealing a work as the Chinese classic.

1. e.g. 7,27. The Master said: 'There are men, probably, who do things correctly without knowing the reason why, but I am not like that: I hear much, select the good and follow it; I see much and treasure it up. This is the next best thing to philosophical knowledge.'

2. e.g. 10,12 "When his stable was burnt down, on coming forth from the audience he asked, 'Is anyone hurt?' He did not ask about the horses."

In the general ethical treatment of the two books, while there are not a few resemblances,<sup>1</sup> there are also many points of difference. Along certain lines the Chinese book strikes a deeper note. Confucius saw with great perspicuity the importance of motives. Again and again he emphasised the fact that the important element was a man's inner spirit and not the outward act. Proverbs, on the other hand, gave its main energy to describing the good or bad man's deeds and said less of his thoughts and heart. The good man, for example, passes over offences,<sup>2</sup> cares for the rights of the poor,<sup>3</sup> keeps clear of strife,<sup>4</sup> does not indulge in slander,<sup>5</sup> nor vent his hate,<sup>6</sup> is reticent<sup>7</sup> and hard-working;<sup>8</sup> but the microscope is not turned on his inmost soul. The danger of doing good in order to seem good is not realized, and there is therefore a lack of emphasis on the necessity for purity and sincerity.

Despite the fact that the Analects goes further into the crannies and corners of a man's heart than the book of Proverbs, it does not go down to the very deeps of his being as the latter succeeds in doing. It hardly penetrates to the fact of evil. When Confucius does come near the subject, the suggestion is always made that man, if he will, can amend his ways and escape

---

1. See pp. 266-269, 285-290.

2. 17,9; 19,11.

3. 29,7a.

4. 20,3.

5. 11,13b.

6. 24,29; 25,21.

7. 10,14a.

8. 10,5.

from the clutches of evil. Confucius, however, admits that with the passing of time it becomes more and more difficult for a man to change. "If a man reach forty and yet be disliked by his fellows, he will be so to the end."<sup>1</sup> As a rule, it is the optimistic strain in Confucius' philosophy that proves the stronger, and that weighs down the witness of fact. Evil is folly, he holds. Once man realizes his folly, he will set himself to have done with it, and since he has on his side the moral force of the universe he will succeed in his endeavour if he but try hard enough. The point of view of Proverbs is curiously different. Instead of there being one main path leading upwards on which all men if they will may walk, there are two roads, on one of which the good travel while the other is the highway of the wicked. Once a man has set his foot on the latter road, it would almost seem as if, in the opinion of the Wise, his fate and destination were fixed; he must journey on that road to the end. Confucius over-emphasises the ability of man to change his ways, while Proverbs underrates the potency of the will. Both, though in different ways, give too little place to the power of God. Confucius stresses so strongly the part that man must play in the making and moulding of his character, that he leaves little or nothing for Heaven to do. Proverbs, on the other hand, makes so much of the hopelessness of the fool and the wicked as to leave

---

1. 17,26; but this is from the more doubtful section of the Analects.

on the mind the impression that they are beyond the power of the Almighty.<sup>1</sup>

In one pregnant sentence, Confucius gives his view-point with regard to the palmary question of the end of life and the fate of those whose lives are out of harmony with that for which they were created. "Man is born for uprightness. Without it he is lucky to escape with his life."<sup>2</sup> What the Chinese sage said once, the Wise men of Palestine say over and over again.

"The wicked are overthrown, and are not;  
But the house of the righteous shall stand." 3

"Behold, the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth:  
How much more the wicked and the sinner." 4

The Wise were driven to excogitate a materialistic view of reward and punishment in this life by their desire to vindicate the justice and righteousness of God. The problem presented by the seeming injustices of this world was apparent also to some of the early thinkers of China, as certain of the Odes in the Shih Ching show. The attempt was made to solve the difficulty by denying the righteousness of God.<sup>5</sup> With that solution Confucius would

1. There are only two verses in Proverbs, 26,12 and 29,20; and in effect these are one, since the form is so similar, where any ray of light is held out in regard to the possibility of the reformation of the fool.
2. 6,17.
3. 12,7.
4. 11,31. See also 10,6; 10,25 and 29;12;2; 13,13; 16,25; 17,13b.
5. See p. 67 of thesis.

have nothing to do. As a matter of fact, the problem does not seem to have presented itself to his mind with the urgency with which it seized some of the earlier poets of his race. It was his vocation not to vindicate the ways of Heaven to man - how could a single human being attempt to do such a thing? he might have said - but rather to justify man's place in God's world by the rectitude of his life. Uprightness was its own reward. The strength of this conviction gives to Confucius' ethical views a disinterestedness that Proverbs lacks. There is a fine lack of the point of view that wealth and position are assets of real value, and that poverty is a serious drawback - a type of thought that is only too frequently presented in the Hebrew book of wisdom.<sup>1</sup> The note of self-sacrifice that is conspicuous by its absence in Proverbs is sounded again and again in the Analects. "The resolute scholar and the Virtuous man will not seek life at the expense of Virtue. Some even sacrifice their lives to crown their virtue."<sup>2</sup> Confucius was sceptical of the value of physical courage, but he had an unassuageable belief in moral courage. There was no doubt whatsoever in his mind but that all lesser goods were to be freely and gladly given up at the call of a higher loyalty. Running through the Analects there is an under-

---

1. e.g. 10,15 - "The rich man's wealth is his strong city; The destruction of the poor is their poverty"; also 18,11a. Then there are the mordant words of 14,20 - "The poor is hated even of his own neighbour: But the rich hath many friends", of 19,4 and 19,7 - "All the brethren of the poor do hate him: How much more do his friends go far from him!"

2. 15,8. See also 14,13.

current of joy in simplicity, and a sense of the relative unimportance of the material that one does not find in the book of Proverbs

It is possible that some explanation (but only a partial and fragmentary one) of Confucius' emphasis on self-sacrifice even to death can be found in his view of the after-life. The silence of Proverbs on the subject may also in part be accounted for by the conception held of Sheol. Confucius was reticent on the subject of the life of the departed; but one thing is clear, that in the ancient beliefs which he inherited there was an element of simple joy in the remembrance of the dead by the living, and that there was a strain of thought that regarded the dead as raised to a higher status of life and power than they had occupied on earth. There was also present another and more sinister element, which seems to have crept in from the lower animistic beliefs of the people, but it was the former conception that was the predominant one in the classical tradition which Confucius inherited.<sup>1</sup> When the book of Proverbs was compiled, the after-world presented itself in a very different guise to the imagination of the Hebrew people. Sheol was a place of gloom and shadow and dread, cut off both from the living and the Lord of the living. With such a conception of the after-world, it would be well-nigh impossible for the Wise to contemplate in detached fashion precipitate entrance therein, or to advocate the abandonment of warm, rich life in fellowship with God and man for such

---

1. See pp.47-53 of thesis.

a bleak, empty existence as Sheol was held to provide.<sup>1</sup> Since Confucius held no such sombre picture of the habitat of the departed, it would be easier for him than for the Wise of Palestine to feel a noble contempt of death. It was a psychological impossibility for men who regarded Sheol as a yawning, devouring pit, to do other than seek to avoid it at all costs. In part, this line of thought may serve as an extenuation of the silence of Proverbs on the subject of self-sacrifice. Even if the Wise are given the benefit of this argument, one must at the same time frankly acknowledge that the readiness to lay down life itself for Virtue is a most commendable feature of the Confucian ethic, and a feature in which it surpasses Proverbs.

In the actual detailed treatment of certain ethical questions, there are interesting differences between the Hebrew and Chinese position. In discussing the relationship of parent and child, for example, the book of Proverbs emphasises the duties of both,<sup>2</sup> while the Analects concentrates on the responsibilities of the son. Relatively, the subject does not occupy a particularly large place in the Lun Yü. "The emphasis on filial

1. See pp. 146-149 of thesis.

2. The teaching of Proverbs on the mutual obligations of parents and children might be summarised as follows: The responsibility and glory of parenthood - it brings both joy and sorrow; parents should train, punish, and leave wealth to their children.

The responsibility of sonship - children should treat their parents well; and should listen to their teaching and advice.

piety in Confucianism", says a Chinese writer, "is not to be accredited to Confucius. Confucius was interested in the making of a man rather than in the making of a son. According to the author of the History of Chinese Philosophy, Mr. Hu Shih, the emphasis upon filial piety should be attributed to Neo-Confucianists, not to Confucius."<sup>1</sup> This is doubtless true, but the fact remains that when Confucius does speak in the Analects of the relations of parent and son, all the emphasis is on the duty of the younger generation to the older.<sup>2</sup>

Although Confucius says little or nothing about the responsibilities and duties of a father, he has much to say about the work and technique of a teacher. His conversation is interlarded with references to the student's life, the joy of study, the art of teaching, and the spirit of the teacher.<sup>3</sup> In Proverbs, on the other hand, the subject is presented rather by

1. The Confucian Civilization. Z.K? Zia. p. 28.
2. It is dangerous to make categorical assertions about the influence of a great man on the life of his countrymen, and to attribute certain national characteristics to his teaching, when the origin of these may be of a much more complex and elusive kind. It can hardly be questioned, however, that the Confucian emphasis on filial piety has had something to do with the stability and conservatism of the Chinese. For untold years the youth of China has been habituated to submit its will to the dictates of the older generation. This submission has doubtless made for stability, but it has also been inimical to progress. Within the last decade or two a revolution in the thought and practice of the ages on the subject has begun and is under way.
3. See pp. 227-230 of thesis.



hint and suggestion than by definite statement, and it is not always clear whether the reference is to parent and child or to master and pupil. People are exhorted to

"Buy the truth, and sell it not;  
Yea, wisdom, and instruction, and understanding." 1

For their heartening they are told that "knowledge is easy unto him that hath understanding."<sup>2</sup> The value of a receptive spirit and application in study is stressed -

"Incline thine ear, and hear the words of the wise,  
And apply thine heart unto my knowledge." 3

Emphasis is placed on the necessity for receiving correction, which was evidently very unwelcome to Jewish youth to judge from the number of references to the benefits to be obtained therefrom and the consequences of refusing it.

"As an earring of gold, and an ornament of fine gold,  
So is a wise reproof upon an obedient ear." 4.

On the whole, however, there is much less frequent reference in Proverbs than in the Analects to what one might call the ethics of the classroom. This is not surprising in view of the respective genesis and aim of the two books. The Lun Tü gives the conversation of a Master with his students, whom he was training to be the teachers of the future. The format of Proverbs is very different. The first nine chapters, in

1. 23,23. (This verse does not appear in the Sept.)

2. 14,6b.

3. 22,17. Also 23,12. cf. with the parallel in Amen-em-ope, 'Give thine ear, and hear what I say, And apply thine heart to apprehend.'

4. 25,12. Toy suggests 'reproof' as better than 'reprover'.  
See also 10,17; 12,1 and 15; 15,10 and 32; 17,10; 29,1.

addition to serving as an introduction to the whole book, may be, as has been suggested, a series of lessons which a sage has drawn up for his pupils - hence the repetition and hortatory tone. If this were so, it would be no matter for surprise if there were in that section little or nothing about the theory and practice of education, since a teacher does not expatiate on these to the pupils he is instructing, although the principles of pedagogy underpin all that he says. In the chapters that follow there is naturally comparatively little said on the subject. The main collections of the proverbs represent the point of view of the average man, who is not pre-eminently interested in what is, after all, only one section of life, and a somewhat isolated section, the relationship of master and pupil.

As befits a book of proverbial lore, Proverbs has much to say of woman. It deals, with unpleasant fulness and detail, with the woman of the street, of whose evil influence it speaks in frankest terms. In view of the circumstances of the time, the emphasis doubtless was salutary and wise. In pleasing contrast is the noble picture it paints of the good woman, capable and effective in the world of practical life, an honoured figure in her own home. No higher tribute could be paid to the Jewish wife than that given in the simple words of the proverb, "A prudent wife is from the Lord".<sup>1</sup> In sharp contrast to the

---

1. 19,14. See also pp. 107-109 of thesis.

number of references to woman in Proverbs is the way in which the Analects practically ignores her existence. Confucius refers to her only twice, and in both cases in an uncomplimentary manner.<sup>1</sup> His silence on the subject, or, on occasion, his contemptuous attitude may in part be explained by the circumstances of his life. His marriage does not seem to have been a happy one; his constant wanderings from court to court and state to state would make it difficult or impossible for him to become intimate with women; and the very closeness of his relationships with his students, who were to him what children are to their parents, provided a substitute for the normal, warm intimacies of home-life.<sup>2</sup> These circumstances may in part account for his attitude which, nevertheless, is to be deplored. It does not do justice to the women of China, who, by their inherent capacity and character, deserve a far higher position than that accorded to them by a philosophy that virtually ignores their existence. By leaving them out of account, moreover, Confucius greatly restricts the range and comprehensiveness that usually characterise his outlook.

Sometimes a particular line of thought followed by the Wise men of Palestine or by the Chinese sage runs along the route that one would expect, knowing the point from which they started. It is the direct consequent on the earlier thinking of their race.

---

1. 8,20 - "One of its Ministers was a woman, so that in reality there were only nine men"; 9,17 - "I have never yet seen a man whose love of virtue equalled his love of woman". See pp.225, 226 of thesis.

2. See also pp. 287-289 of thesis.

There is, however, at least one striking exception to this, one instance on which Confucius wears the mantle that one would have expected to have been worn by the compilers of Proverbs; while they are strangely silent on the subject of religious worship, he, reserved and reticent as he is on spiritual matters, becomes the whole-hearted exponent of such worship. The Wise, belonging to a people who have made a pre-eminent and unique contribution to the public worship of Almighty God, say almost nothing on the subject. Once they urge the offering of part of one's substance to God,<sup>1</sup> and there are a few references to sacrifice, mostly on the lines that the paying of sacrifices can be no substitute for righteous conduct.<sup>2</sup> There are, however, no explicit references to specific feasts or fasts, to priests or Levites, or to the paraphernalia of altar or Temple.

It is very different in the Analects. Confucius speaks with fair frequency on ceremonial worship and the warmth and note of conviction in his remarks are unmistakable. He was appalled when ceremonial observances were carried out wrongly, by unauthorized people, or in unauthorized places. "If this be allowed to pass", he said on one occasion, "what may not be allowed?"<sup>3</sup> On

1. 3,9 - "Honour the Lord with thy substance, And with the first-fruits of all thine increase."
2. 15,8 - "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord!"  
21,3 - "To do justice and judgement is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice." See also 21,27; 17,1.
3. 3,1. "The head of a powerful family of nobles in Confucius' native State employed eight sets of choristers (an Imperial prerogative) in their family chapel. Confucius, remarking on this, was heard to say, 'If this is allowed to pass, what may not be allowed?'" (Ku Hung Ming's trans.)

another occasion when a certain nobleman was going to usurp an Imperial prerogative and sacrifice on a sacred mountain on which only the Emperor or certain princes could sacrifice, Confucius said to a disciple, "Can you not do anything to save him from this?" "No", was the reply. "Ah, then", answered Confucius, "it is useless to say anything more."<sup>1</sup> He was very conscious both of the immense significance and of the mystery of the great acts of worship. "Someone asked the meaning of the great sacrifice. The Master said, 'I do not know. He who knew its meaning would find it as easy to govern the kingdom as to look on this.'<sup>2</sup> pointing to his palm." On entering a certain temple for the first time, ('the State Cathedral', according to Ku Hung-Ming), "he enquired as to what he should do at every stage of the service."<sup>3</sup> When objection was raised as to the cost of a sacrifice, he retorted, "What you would save is the cost of the sheep; what I would save is the principle of the rite."<sup>4</sup> The interest that he felt, moreover, was more than that of the mere traditionalist

---

1. 3,6. See also 3,2 for his condemnation of the wrong use of ritual. These illustrations all have a political bearing, but they also have a religious significance. 3,10 is on the same lines - "The Master said, 'At the great sacrifice, after the pouring out of the libation, I have no wish to look on.'" (Legge's trans.) Legge's note on this is, "A royal rite, its use in Lu was wrong., but there was something in the service after the early act of libation inviting the descent of the spirits which more particularly moved the anger of Confucius."

2. 3,11 - Legge's trans.

3. 3,15 - Ku Hung-Ming's trans.

4. 3,17 - " " " " .

or antiquarian. "Confucius worshipped the dead as if he actually felt the presence of the departed ones. He worshipped the Spiritual Powers as if he actually felt the presence of the Powers."<sup>1</sup>

The difference in the line of treatment on the subject adopted by the two books presents a real problem. It is not easy to reconcile Confucius' enthusiasm for ceremonial rites with the guarded nature of his utterances on religious beliefs. Neither is it an easy matter to explain the silence of the Wise on a subject that occupied so much of the attention of the religious thought of the land. An obvious explanation in the latter case would be that the Wise were not interested in or held in contempt the formal, organized side of religion. Such an explanation, however, would be no explanation at all. "To suppose", says Oesterley, "that the Chäkāmim were opponents of the sacrificial system, or of liturgical worship generally, would be a great mistake. They had not the remotest desire to depreciate these, nor do they ever utter a word to this effect; had such a thing ever been suspected by the religious authorities it is certain that our book would never have been admitted into the Canon."<sup>2</sup> It is conceivable that a possible and partial explanation might be found in the respective psychologies of the two peoples. The Hebrews had the power of dichotomising life,

---

1. 3,12. Ku Hung-Ming's trans.

2. The Book of Proverbs. W.O.E. Oesterley. p. 67. Introduction. Quoted also on pp. 143 of thesis.

of keeping different interests separate from each other, of ploughing a single furrow without lifting a glance to a neighbour's strip of land. The poet might express his religious hopes, strivings and satisfactions in a psalm that made no mention of God's care of the nation. The oracles of the prophet might centre round social, national and international problems, and might almost ignore the individual. The priest concerned himself with the Torah, and the Wise with Wisdom, and in their respective writings there might be little or no mention of religious forces other than their own. If the Analects can be taken as a typical expression of Chinese psychology - and it is typical - the mentality of China was different. It tended to view life as a unity. Confucius included everything within his gaze, politics and education, home-life and music, history and literature, religious beliefs and ceremonial observances; he subsumed all the multiple interests of the visible and invisible world under the one caption, 'Life'.

Reference has already been made<sup>1</sup> to the influence of Proverbs and the Analects on the life and character of the peoples among whom the books were circulated. The standard and ideals of the Wise of Palestine and the sage of China became in large measure formative spiritual forces in the lives of <sup>the</sup> Jewish and Chinese peoples. With regard to the former, however, this

---

1. For the influence of Proverbs, see pp. 290-292 ; for the influence of the Analects, see pp. 236-237, 262, 264, 290, 291, 293.

statement requires amplification. To those of Hebrew race, the Wisdom writings were only a section of the rich literature of their land. The Law, the Prophets, and the Writings made up the whole. The last, in particular, required to be supplemented and completed by the Law and the Prophets. In practice, therefore, the omissions and defects of the book of Proverbs, its scanty references to prayer and worship, its failure to emphasise the noblest virtues of love and self-sacrifice, were not a very serious matter since its somewhat calculating and moderate point of view was supplemented by the religious passion of the psalmist, the simple, childlike faith that runs through the J and E tales, and the selfless, searching ethics of the prophets.

With the Analects it is otherwise. Confucius' Conversations give, on the whole, a cross-section of his philosophy. What is said in concrete, illustrative form in the Lun Yü is typical of the Confucian spirit. So far, therefore, as the after influence of the Analects is concerned, its defects and omissions matter more than do those of Proverbs since what is ignored by Confucius is not found in other Confucian literature. It is true that the facts which he failed to stress may be found in Buddhist philosophy or Taoist ritual, but there is no logical connection between these and Confucianism, as there is between the various strains of Hebrew thought. With the Jews, the detailed enactments of the Law, the moral truths adumbrated by the prophets, the religious out-pourings of the psalmist, the common-sense ethics of the Wise, are all bound up together round the



great central conception of the unity and power and righteousness of God. The Chinese obtained a measure of empirical success in bringing together the strong points of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism, but there is no intellectual unity, no philosophical coherence between the three systems. The extent to which Confucius' fellow-countrymen have had to turn to other schools of religious thought and practice for further light on such questions as God, the spirits, and the after-life, marks the measure of Confucius' failure to meet their need. The cold caution he gave regarding the spirits, 'while respecting them, to avoid them', or, if the more positive and reliable translation be allowed, 'to respect spiritual beings, maintaining the proper distance in relations with them',<sup>1</sup> may satisfy those endowed with the philosophic temperament. But it is far too colourless and negative a counsel for the majority of men, as a study of China's religious history makes plain. Countless Chinese men and women, compelled by the needs of their own being, have been forced to turn elsewhere for that which they failed to find in Confucius.

There is real justification for speaking of the reality of Confucius' religious faith. Nevertheless, it does fall short of the simple, natural belief in God expressed in the book of Proverbs. According to Hebrew Wisdom, God is the one primary fact from which all else follows, the created world, the realm of thought, the righteousness of men. In the Analects, on the

---

1. 16.20. See pp. 213 of thesis.

other hand, God is rather the faint, elusive background of the whole. It is a real background, that gives meaning and significance to all life, but it is faint in colour and nebulous in outline. In Proverbs, the chief actor, the mighty doer is God; in the Analects, the light falls almost entirely on the activities of man. The book of Hebrew Wisdom is based foursquare on the idea that all that is of spiritual worth belongs to the 'given'. Confucian doctrine, while not denying this, lays the emphasis rather on the formative part that man has to play in the moral process.

In the final analysis, neither book must be judged for what it fails to give, but rather for what it succeeds in giving to the world's heritage of thought. Even if the Analects has grave omissions, which are not supplied in other writings of the Confucian school, the fact remains that the sage of China succeeded in giving a most noble delineation of man, ceaselessly struggling to attain to moral truth, continually striving to reach the goal of virtue. "If religion", says Suzuki, "be represented by the Hebrews, philosophy by the Greeks, and mysticism by the Hindus, practical morality must be said to be the most characteristic trait of the thought which prevailed among the people of the Middle Kingdom. It has been their inmost conviction that the universe is the manifestation of a moral principle, and that every existence<sup>1</sup> ... has some mission to teach humanity a moral lesson."

If the comparison between the general teaching of

---

1. A Brief History of Early Chinese Philosophy. Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki. p. 47.

Proverbs and the Analects could be narrowed to a single point, it might be said that the latter presents a nobler conception of what man is and might be, were he to give his whole heart and soul to the attainment of virtue. Where Proverbs surpasses the Analects is in the vividness and warmth of its thought of God. With its essentially moral conception of God, the time would come when the righteous God of Whom the Wise spoke would lift man on and up to higher ethical levels. The book that was religiously stronger would in the end of the day have a deeper and more potent moral influence. Since "the Lord trieth the hearts",<sup>1</sup> the ethical progress of man was assured, as was also the disclosure of heights of moral endeavour that at the outset were completely hidden from his sight.

When one is dealing with books of real and lasting greatness, there comes a time when further study of their respective strong and weak points misses the mark. Truth is truth, wherever found. The important point is not that in certain respects the Analects reaches a higher standard than Proverbs while in others the sapiential Wisdom of the Hebrews far surpasses that of China. The fact of real significance is this - that as long ago as the fifth century B.C. in the (then) small and isolated Empire of China in the East of Asia, and in the tiny country of Palestine in the West of the continent, there should be in existence two books, or parts of books, at one in setting up a high ethical

---

1. 17,3b.

standard, at one in their conception of man's true dignity, at one in their clear grasp of the relations between man's little life and the principles in and behind the universe. This was the point from which we started,<sup>1</sup> and to it, once again, the argument has carried us.

There were differences, some very real ones, between the way in which Hebrew and Chinese sages worked out the conceptions they held in common, though in isolation from one another. These very differences add to the cultural and ethical enrichment of the world. Broadly speaking, one might say that the Wise men of Hebrew race worked down from the unseen to the seen, and emphasised the part played by the Divine.<sup>2</sup> Confucius, on the other hand, worked from the seen to the unseen, and stressed the responsibility of man in the working out of his own salvation. Both emphases are required; each is complementary to the other. The matter could not be summed up better than in the words of an Imperial decree issued in 638 A.D., on the occasion of the visit of the Nestorian missionaries to China;<sup>3</sup> "The Truth does not always appear under the same name, nor is divine inspiration always embodied in the same form. Religions vary in various lands,

1. See Chapter 1 of thesis

2. In Proverbs 2, 1-5, where man is urged to search for wisdom, the order is and line of thought is closely akin to the Chinese. But from v. 6 onwards, the true Hebrew speaks - "For the Lord giveth Wisdom".

3. The Nestorian Mission reached China in 631; by 635 the new faith had made strong headway, its missionaries were allowed to settle in the capital. In 638 the first Christian Church was built there and the above decree issued.

but the underlying principle of all is the salvation of mankind."<sup>1</sup>

The motif of Proverbs might be found in the words -

"Whoso findeth me findeth life,  
And shall obtain favour of the Lord." 2

Confucius, more concisely, put the key-thought of his doctrine in one character 恕, which might be translated by 'Sympathy',<sup>3</sup> 'Reciprocity' or 'Charity'. The compilers of the book of Proverbs found the secret of life to lie in a man's relations to his God and his God's relations to him. Confucius saw the meaning of life in a man's relations to his fellows. Both discoveries are of the utmost value. When man is knit to God in reverent fear and to his brother-man in sympathetic understanding, then will be found the Wisdom for which the sages of Palestine and China longed, and of which they obtained satisfying glimpses.

"Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom:  
Yea, with all thou hast gotten get understanding." 4.

---

1. Confucianism and Its Rivals. Herbert A. Giles. p. 196.

2. 8,35.

3. Soothill translated it by Sympathy, Legge by Reciprocity (or Altruism), and Ku Hung-Ming by Charity. 15,23.

4. 4,7.

## B I B L I O G R A P H Y.

## THE BOOK OF PROVERBS.

- |   |                      |
|---|----------------------|
| Critical and Exegetical Commentary on<br>the Book of Proverbs.            | Crawford H. Toy.     |
| Commentary on the Proverbs of Solomon.                                    | Franz Delitzsch.     |
| The Book of Proverbs.   | W.O.E. Oesterley.    |
| The Century Bible, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes<br>and Song of Songs.           | G. Currie Martin.    |
| The Old Testament. A New Translation.                                     | James Moffatt.       |
| The Book of Proverbs.   | R. F. Horton.        |
| Job and Solomon, or The Wisdom of the<br>Old Testament                    | T. K. Cheyne.        |
| The Wisdom Literature of the Old<br>Testament.                            | W. T. Davison.       |
| The Wisdom Books in Modern Speech.  | John Edgar McFadyen. |
| The Wise Men of Ancient Israel and<br>Their Proverbs.                     | Charles Fester Kent. |
| Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics.<br>Articles on Proverbs and Wisdom. |                      |

The Expositor Vol.12, 1880. Articles on The Wisdom of the Hebrews.	A. B. Davidson.
Notes on the Book of Proverbs, mostly from Eastern Writings, 3 Vol.	S. C. Malan.
Studies in Life from Jewish Proverbs.	W. A. L. Elmslie.
The Wisdom of Egypt and the Old Testament.	W.O.E. Oesterley.
The Teaching of Amen-em-Apt.	E. Wallis Budge.
The Origin and Growth of Religion.	C. G. Montefiore.
Hebrew Religion, Its Origin and Development.	W.O.E. Oesterley and T. H. Robinson.
The Religion of Israel under the Kingdom.	Adam C. Welch.
The Theology of the Old Testament.	A. B. Davidson.
The Religious Ideas of the Old Testament.	H. Wheeler Robinson.
Immortality and the Unseen World.	W.O.E. Oesterley.
Biblical and Literary Essays.	A. B. Davidson.
Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament.	S. R. Driver.
The Poets of the Old Testament.	Alexander R. Gordon.
The Apocrypha.	
The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha.	R. H. Charles.

The Wisdom of Solomon.	J. A. F Gregg.
The Old Testament in the Jewish Church.	Robertson Smith.
Jerusalem under the High Priests.	Edwyn Bevan.
The Sayings of the Jewish Fathers. Pirke Aboth.	W.G.E. Oesterley.
Ancient Jewish Proverbs.	A. Cohen.
The Biblical History of the Hebrews.	F.J. Foakes-Jackson.
Proverbs and Their Lessons.	R. C. Trench.
Woman in World History.	E. M. White.

---



## B I B L I O G R A P H Y.

## THE ANALECTS.

- Sacred Books of the East: Edited by Max  
Müller. Vol.3 Shu King. Shih King. Hsiao King. James Legge.
- The Four Books (with English Translation and  
Notes). James Legge.
- The Analects of Confucius. William Edward  
Soothill.
- The Discourses and Sayings of Confucius. Ku Hung-Ming.
- A Short History of Chinese Civilization. Richard Wilhelm.
- Chinese Civilization. Marcel Granet.
- A Brief History of Early Chinese Philosophy. Daisetz Teitaro  
Suzuki.
- { Religions of the World, Their Nature and  
Their History. Ed. by Carl Clemens.
- { Essay on Chinese Religion: F.E.A. Krause.
- Ten Great Religions. James Freeman  
Clark.
- The Original Religion of China. John Ross.

The Religions of China.	James Legge.
The Three Religions of China.	William Edward Soothill.
Confucianism and its Rivals.	Herbert A. Giles.
The Religion of the Chinese.	J.J.M. De Groot.
Religions of Ancient China.	Herbert A. Giles.
Studies in Chinese Religion.	E. H. Parker.
China and Religion.	E. H. Parker.
Chinese Religious Ideas.	P. J. MacLagan.
Lao-Tsze the Great Thinker.	G. G. Alexander.
Confucius the Great Teacher.	G. G. Alexander.
The Life and Teachings of Confucius.	James Legge.
The Confucian Analects.	W. Jennings
Sayings of Confucius.	Leonard Lyall.
The Proverbial Philosophy of Confucius.	Forster Jennings.
The Philosophy of Confucius.	C. Y. Hsü.
The Political Philosophy of Confucianism.	Leonard Shihlien Hsü.
Chinese Political Thought.	Liang Chi Chao.

**The Ethics of Confucius.**

**M. M. Dawson.**

**Confucius and Confucianism. Trans. into  
English by**

**Richard Wilhelm.  
George and Annina  
Danton.**

**The Development of the Logical Method  
in Ancient China.**

**Hu Shih.**

**The Origin and Development of the State  
Cult of Confucius.**

**John K. Shryock.**

**National Proverbs (China).**

**Lion and Dragon in Northern China.**

**R. F. Johnston.**

**T'oung Pao. Vol.29. Année 1932. Article by**

**H. G. Creel.**

**Chinese Literature.**

**Herbert A. Giles.**

**International Journal of Ethics. Jan.1908  
Article by**

**Chester Holcombe.**

**Sound and Symbol in Chinese.**

**Bernhard Karlgren.**